

# HIGH WYCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

## Saffron Platt and London Road Area Study 6

*This document forms part of a larger conservation appraisal for High Wycombe, and should be read in conjunction with the master document, which gives development control guidelines.*

### 1 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

The Saffron Platt and London Road areas of the conservation area are contiguous, and run to the northern side of The Rye sub area and to the east of Easton Street sub area. Their setting is enhanced by the open space and tree lined hillsides of The Rye, onto which they face.

#### ***Location and Population***

This sub area of High Wycombe lies on the boundaries of the medieval borough and thus close to the centre. Until the mid 19th century Saffron Platt would have been located on the outskirts of town, now it lies within the larger urban sprawl of High Wycombe which has expanded to envelope other small distinctive hamlets along the river valley.

#### ***General character, plan form and landscape context***

The Rye comprises a large flat area of former water meadow, now a public park. Along the north side lies the London Road (A40), the historic route into the town centre. There are no buildings to the south side of this road, instead a grand Victorian “Normanesque” Trinity Congregational Church and 18th and 19th century townhouses of some distinction face onto the road enjoying views of The Rye and the wooded hillsides to the south. The original large elongated plots can still be identified, although there has been some redevelopment at the western end which has disrupted the plot layout. Behind the town houses on London Road lies Saffron Platt, an area of mid and late 19th century terraced workers houses, elevated above the valley bottom on a steep hillside and bounded to the north by the railway cutting. This has a much tighter urban form of small houses on narrow plots, some of which have been lost to redevelopment. The different types of buildings within the two zones provide contrast and interest to the area.



London Road runs along the valley bottom into the centre of town. To the south of it in this particular location lies the open space of The Rye, which has a southern backdrop of well wooded hillside. The Rye also lies within the wider Conservation Area. The northern side of the road is densely built up, with urban expansion beginning on the land behind the route from the mid 19th century onwards. Immediately south of London Road runs the River Wye which played an important role in the development of the town. Two of its many mills lay at each end of the green space – Pann Mill, its wheel house restored by the High Wycombe Society, and Rye Mill, where no remnant of the former mill buildings remain. The latter was renowned for its fine paper. To the north of London Road the land rises steeply up to the railway line and beyond. The relief allows for views of the valley floor.



*London Road viewed from the junction with Stuart Road. The graceful Regency lines of 21-3 are enhanced by the delicate verandah, a feature of the area.*

## 2 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

### *Origins and historic development* **Saffron Platt**

This area of settlement grew up on land originally outside the medieval borough boundaries. Until the development of the railway in 1854 this area and land to the north was known as Town Field, a name which makes reference to the common fields once used by the inhabitants of the Borough. The railway line essentially cut this area in half, with the northern part renamed Wheelers Field (a reference to the local brewery family), and the southern part Saffron Platt. It is thought that the name has origins in the 16th century and refers to a small plot of land upon which the autumn crocus, which produced saffron, was grown. During the mid 19th century High Wycombe's population was growing rapidly and the land was developed for housing to cater for a growing working class population. The 1871 census shows a number of mill workers living in the locality, employed at Pann or Rye Mills. The 1876 map shows the new development to both sides of the railway line; to the east and the north fields remain. The furniture making industry was also important, with workshops and factories located nearby in Queen Street.

The main pattern of development at Saffron Platt ran off two roads, with a square form at the centre. Railway Place once had terraced houses along both sides, these have since made way for a municipal car park. Stuart Road ran into Easton Terrace, Saffron Road, Station Road, and Aveling Road, forming four sides of a square, with houses to both roadsides. To the north of Railway Place was a burial ground (Society of Friends).

Saffron Platt was the birthplace of Wycombe Wanderers, when local

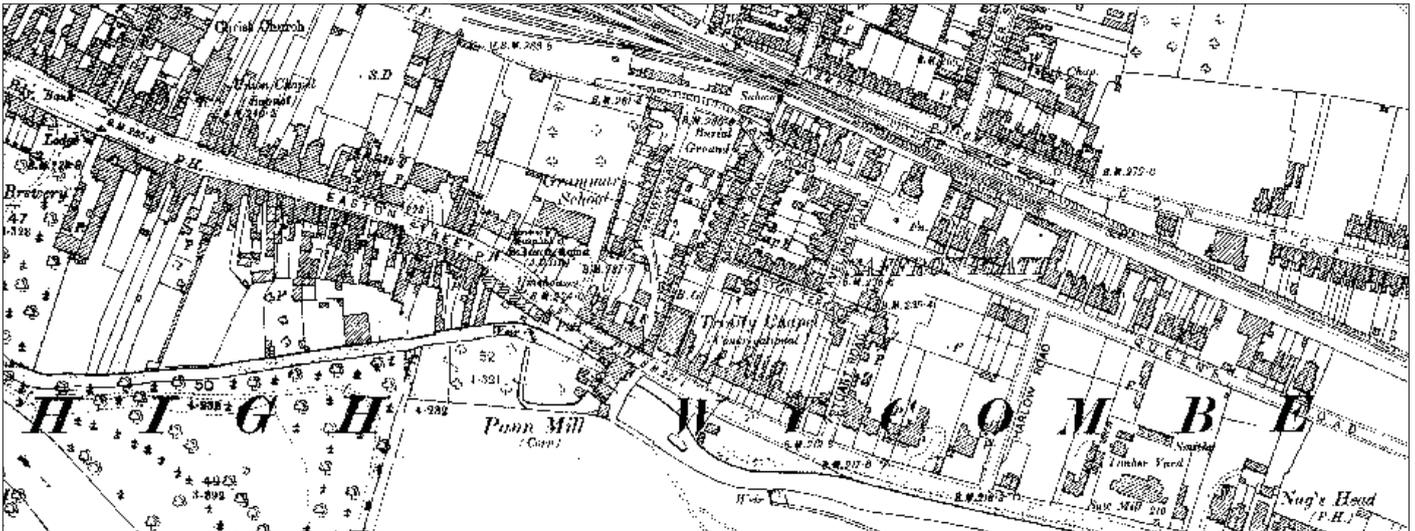


*The wooded hillside beyond The Rye, a key part of the wider conservation area, and important in views from Saffron Platt.*



*The Wye, beyond Pann Mill. London Road runs alongside this important river. The photo below shows Pann Mil with Trinity Congregation Chapel and Bedford Row.*





lads met in the Masons Arms and set up a football team in 1888.

### **London Road**

This was one of the main routes into the town, and turnpiked in 1718, yet as late as 1897 development along it was piecemeal. The area opposite The Rye lay partly within the medieval borough, and this was developed in the 18th century. Only the north side of the road was utilized for building – The Rye, to the south, was the town pasture.

The Trinity Congregational Church (originally Chapel) was built in 1850 to the design of Charles Searle. The congregation relocated from the Ebenezer chapel which had been located on Easton Street. The terrace of houses to the east of it date from the late 19th to early 20th century and are fine examples of Regency town houses. Further east the land was redeveloped after 1876; previously there were detached buildings, possibly farms, orchards and clusters of workers cottages opposite Rye Mill. There was also a Smithy. Beyond Rye Mill lay farm land.

### **Archaeology**

None recorded.

1899 OS showing the former complex street layout to the rear of London Road.. Below the demolished frontages to Railway Place.



Excellent historic streetscape showing the diversity of 18th and 19th century buildings clustered in this locality. Originally the central group of houses would have displayed more conformity, the right hand one was updated in the 19th century.



### Historic Maps

1876, 1899 OS. These show the original layout of plots north of the London Road.

## 3 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

### *The Character and inter-relationship of spaces within the area*

The key open space in the area is The Rye, which lies in a different sub area. Nonetheless it has an important role to play in terms of setting, particularly of the listed buildings along London Road. There is no formal open space within the streets of Saffron Platt, unless one counts the rather grim municipal car park at Railway Place. This, and the adjacent County Council offices, have rightly been excluded from the conservation area, and their development completely destroyed the 19th century tight urban street pattern. Much of Saffron Road is excluded for the same reason. A narrow alley runs down the side of The Trinity Congregational Church, a pedestrian linkage with Saffron Platt – at the top is a marker indicating one of the former borough boundary stones

### *Important Views*

The key view of the area is from The Rye, looking across the river to the towers of the Trinity Congregational Church. This takes in the line of listed townhouses which front London Road, and also creates a visual entrance to the centre of High Wycombe.

Views within the conservation area include those east and west along London Road, again with the buildings creating a backdrop to the northern side of the road.

There are panoramic views across London Road of The Rye itself, an important green space almost within the heart of the town. This juxtaposition of verdant countryside and built environment is a key feature of this part of the wider conservation area.

There are views across rooftops from higher up in Saffron Platt, including glimpses of green space and wooded hillside through gaps opposite Easton Terrace. There is a long range view from the pub across town to Tom Burts Hill.

## 4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

### *Activity and Landuse*

Originally both London Road and Saffron Platt were primarily residential areas, London Road catering for the middle classes, and Saffron Platt for the working classes which were the largest growing socio-economic group as Wycombe's industrialisation



*Glimpses through riverside vegetation.*



*The dominant form of No 29, with late Victorian detailing.*



*Looking north west towards Park House.*

*Bedford Row, of 18th century brick. The classical lines of the building are softened by planting.*





expanded in the 19th century. Both areas remain residential but on London Road in particular some of the large formerly domestic houses have now been converted into offices, a school and other business uses. The Friends Meeting House has a domestic appearance. Within Saffron Platt, too, are limited business uses, and newer development taking the form of flats.

***Architectural and historical quality of buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area***

London Road has the only concentration of listed buildings within this part of the wider conservation area. These are clustered between Railway Place junction and Stuart Road, traditionally the limits of the medieval town, and lie on narrow 18th century plots. There are two listed buildings to the east of Stuart Road, but beyond this the buildings, although grand in scale, tend to be later Victorian dwellings, and not currently eligible for listing.

Trinity Congregational Church dates from 1850, is listed Grade II and dominates the street scene locally. Its twin towers are visible in long range views across The Rye, and along London Road. The side elevations are brick, designed to be hidden when the building was constructed as the frontage buildings that ran across Railway Place would have obscured views. The rubble and ashlar Norman style frontage stands out against the red brick of adjacent houses. A three storey block of flats has been built to the west, which reduces the original impact of the Church; old photographs show the building towering over its neighbours.

To the east of the Church, and up to Stuart Road, all the buildings are listed and make an attractive grouping. No's 1-5 sit hard on the roadside, of red and vitreous brick, and are 18th century town 3 storey town houses. Set back behind front gardens, No's 7, 9 and Bedford Row are also of brick, the former two a mixture of chequer and header work. No 7 has been shamefully neglected in recent years. Much of this early 19th century terrace displays a uniformity of scale which adds to the appearance of the building, and they share detailing such as decorative fan lights over the doors.

No 19 London Road (Crown House), is unlisted, and is a substantial 19th century town house, now used as a school. Built of grey header brick it has ashlar-like quoining and window surrounds which make it stand out from its neighbours. Beyond, No's 21-3 has an impressive cast iron

*A view of London Road from The Rye, just across the river. The towers of Trinity Congregational Church soar above the surrounding buildings and form a local landmark. This is the main grouping of listed buildings in the area.*

*The perfect proportions of The Friends Meeting House, in fine rubbed brick.*



*Ashlar stone work on Trinity Congregational Church.*





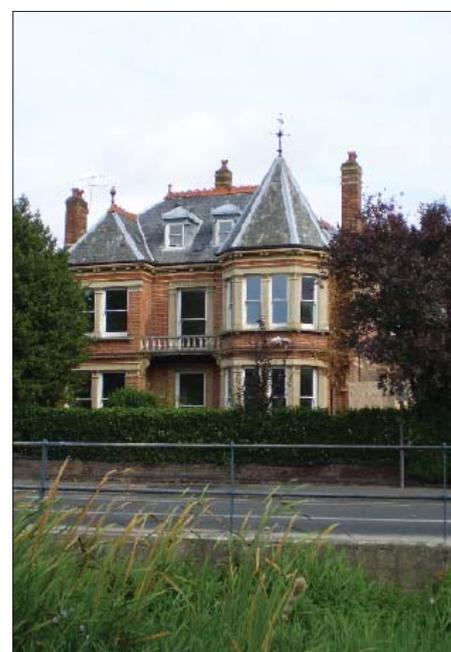
*Bedford Row, a grouping of 18th century buildings, and the grey brick Crown House School.*

verandah and Regency lines. No 25, The Friends Meeting house, is a simple early 19th century building of rubbed red brick at the front, with a name plaque on the wall.

Beyond Stuart Road, the buildings date from the latter part of the 19th century, and the architectural pattern is random. Plot widths are wider, and many of the buildings are detached. Some exhibit Victorian architectural devices such as belvederes, turrets, and gabled bays. Two are listed. Rye House is a particularly fine red brick early 19th century building of simple design. Park House is a later 19th century stucco building with a fine verandah. Also of note are three pairs of semis with steeply pitched slate roofs above projecting bay windows, which add a strong vertical emphasis to the pattern of the street. Houses all have hedged or walled front gardens giving them a degree of separation from the roadside.

Saffron Platt is an attractive little enclave of mid to late 19th century terraced and semi detached houses built in the Italianate style in the later half of the 19th century. Some of the original layout has been lost to redevelopment. The best remnants are found at Easton Terrace, a “designed” row of cottages with protruding hipped slate roofs to either end, and a date stone from 1865. All but one are now painted or rendered; the original red brick can be seen on No 9, which has decorative yellow London stock bands and window surrounds. The design and original materials of this terrace of cottages indicate some quality. Unfortunately the cottages that once lined both sides of Saffron Road have now disappeared, but old photographs indicate similar designs of houses indicating some form of planned layout. This hypothesis is supported by the design of the Masons Arms pub (now the Sausage Tree), which is situated at the corner of Saffron Road and Station Road. The original decorative brickwork has now unfortunately been painted over. Its principle elevation contains groups of round headed windows in accordance with the venetian window principle. The design of No 33, a more imposing yellow brick detached residence at the southern end of Saffron Road, echoes the Venetian Style.

There are larger houses in the Saffron Platt area. Those up Aveling Road are semi-detached, rather than terraced, and are of painted render below roofs of slate, with attractive bay windows. The two properties which visually terminate the northern end of this row command extensive



*High Victoriana on London Road, the building enlivened by belvederes and bays.*

*Prominent slate roofs along the London Road.*



views of The Rye and the heavily treed hillside beyond, this view being reflected in the name of one of these properties, "Park Prospect". At the top of Stuart Road, enjoying views down and across The Rye, a late Victorian pair of semis, the left hand one of which retains many original features, again has decorative yellow accents to the red brickwork. Stuart Lodge is of decorative red brick and may be by renown Victorian local architect Arthur Vernon.

**Key unlisted buildings**

London Road has a high concentration of listed buildings at the western end. Saffron Road has none, due in the main to the more recent date of the buildings.

**Local details**

Walling: Many of the London Road properties have low front walls of old brick, or decorative brick and flint, sometimes planted with hedging or topped with railings. Along Stuart Road the boundary of the Friends Meeting House is defined by a fine brick and flint wall that leads up the hillside to Stuart Lodge. Between this and No's 21- 23 low flint walls line the access track between the properties. Flint and brick walling forms the rear London Road boundaries seen at the southern end of Saffron Road, and the alley way that connects this with London Road also has a substantial old brick wall running along its length. In particular the use of flint hints at the Chiltern palette of materials and helps tie the area into its locality.

There are two historic boundary stones in the Saffron Platt area, now marked with plaques. These delineated the historic medieval Borough boundaries, and are used for "Beating the Bounds", a tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages.

Fire plaques can be seen at Bedford Row, a reminder of historic insurance policies. Also of interest are the old enamel street signs that remain in Saffron Platt, white lettering on a blue background, a rarity these days. The remnant of a grand gate post can be seen on Station Road.

**Prevalent and traditional building materials**

The buildings on London Road utilise the palette of building materials, although the listed group at the western end tend more to brick, this being employed in a variety of bonds, and using coloured brick for decoration. Stucco is used on the listed Park House. Later Victorian buildings are of red brick, enlivened by stone dressings, or of render. Roofs are a mixture of slate or brick, the terrace of gabled buildings at Nos 45-51 have steep pitches of slate as does the former Nurses' home at No 41.

Saffron Platt now has a higher concentration of painted and rendered buildings, although originally the buildings were of red or yellow brick with decorative details picked out in an opposing colour. Roofs are predominantly slate in the area.



*Painted brick at Easton Terrace, in muted neutral shades. Only one cottage retains its original brickwork.*



*The former Masons Arms, with later modern development beyond.*



*No 33 Saffron Road.*

*Easton Terrace.*



### **Contribution made by the natural environment**

The Rye plays a key role in the setting of the listed buildings along London Road, and in views out from higher land in Saffron Platt. This sward of green space visually enhances the buildings and leads to a sense of openness.

The front gardens of the London Road properties do much to enhance the open aspect, and distract the eye from the heavy traffic, as well as blending the built environment into the open space opposite. This is helped by the presence of trees and hedging which blur the hard boundaries. Bedford terrace lines are softened by a wisteria that cloaks the lower floors. There is a particularly fine mature copper beech on the corner of Harlow Road. The houses in Saffron Platt have much smaller front boundaries, and many lie hard to the roadside, in typical Victorian housing fashion. Some hedging softens part of Aveling Road, and larger trees are seen in some of the back gardens and to the front of Rydal Mount and Park Prospect. Otherwise the natural environment plays a lesser role in this tightly built up area, but instead is “borrowed” in longer range views across the rooftops and from vegetation in the back gardens of the London road properties.

### **The extent of loss, problems and pressures**

Loss of historic fabric: There has been unfortunate and widescale replacement of historic windows in the conservation area, particularly in Saffron Platt, with the now ubiquitous uPVC. This has led to a loss of historic character. There are exceptions where traditional fenestration remain and is maintained; No 4 Stewart Road, parts of Easton Terrace, 32 and 33 Saffron Road, and parts of Aveling Road. Where buildings are listed on London Road the traditional historic fenestration is retained, including some excellent fan lights at Bedford Row.

The original design of the Saffron Platt development has been compromised by the use of render and paint which has obscured the original patterned brickwork of the buildings. Much of this predates the designation of the conservation area, and actually the painted and rendered facades still display a degree of conformity with their soft pastel hues. It is unfortunate that the Mason’s Arms has lost its distinctive brickwork facade.

Traffic levels on London Road, the main route into town, and on to Oxford, are very high. Not only can this visually blight the appearance of the conservation area, it also has other sensory effects, notably traffic noise. Moreover there is a great deal of associated traffic signage, and electronic car parking information boards, that are visually intrusive.

Car parking: The visual intrusiveness of car parking is not an issue on the London Road: it is not permitted, In Saffron Platt car parking can prove a problem, particularly as there is a lack of off road spaces due to the tight urban form. The municipal car park at Railway Place, although outside the conservation area, is a visual blight, and more could be done to screen the area from Saffron Road, perhaps by planting.



*A Georgian fanlight on Bedford Row.*



*The vernacular flint wall with brick dressings at the Friends Meeting House.*



*Yellow stock bricks at No 32 Saffron Road, with Italianate detailing.*

*Old wall and borrowed view of The Rye and woodland, Saffron Road.*



# London Road and Saffron Platt

Area 6 Study Appraisal



KEY	
	Listed Buildings
	Buildings of interest/ designed or civic buildings
	Local List
	Green Space
	River
	Railings
	Views
	Sub area Boundary
	Trees and tree groups
	Hedges
	Conservation Area boundary

For illustrative purposes only; not to scale