

Brandon Conservation Area Appraisal

Adopted April 2007



Forest Heath District Council



Brandon Conservation Area Appraisal

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Key Characteristics

- Market town;
- Town developed historically as a crossing point in the Little Ouse river;
- Most attractive views are in and around the river side area;
- Large numbers of flint buildings, most date from the 19th century and are unlisted;
- Most listed buildings adjoin Bridge Street and the High Street, many are former coaching inns;
- St. Peters church is a grade 1 listed building and is currently outside the conservation area designation;
- Town-centre suffers from traffic congestion on the A1065;
- Market Hill would benefit from enhancement as a public square.

Introduction

Conservation Areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act 1967. There are 13 Conservation areas in Forest Heath District'

The Brandon Conservation Area was first designated in 1982, and centred on Market Hill and London Road. In 1991 the Conservation Area was extended to include the High Street, Bridge Street, School Lane and part of Victoria Avenue.



C 16th timber framed Ram Inn Bridge Street

A questionnaire was circulated in February 2006 through the Brandon Community Partnership inviting views prior to the drafting of the appraisal. A number of detailed responses were received. The local community will be invited to comment on a draft appraisal.

The purpose of the appraisal is to define the distinctive character of Brandon. It is not intended to be a history of Brandon, nor an audit of its buildings, but an evaluation of the special architectural and historical interest based on an analysis of the area and its future management.



Flint house London road

This will include advice on controlling and guiding future development and enhancement opportunities.



C19th house with early C20th shop front High Street

This appraisal will consider the conservation area using as a framework the guidelines set out in the English Heritage 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (August 2005) and 'Guidance on the management of Conservation Areas' (August 2005)

Planning Policy

Local planning authorities have a duty to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special interest architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.'

Designation gives additional planning controls to the District Council. Demolition of any buildings regardless of its age or condition will require planning consent and as part of the application for demolition a full comprehensive and detailed plan for the redevelopment of the site will be required. Outline planning permission for new developments in a conservation area will not be granted. New development and extensions to existing buildings will require exacting standards of design and careful consideration of materials.



Orchard next to the school

All trees in the Conservation Area are protected. Felling, coppicing or pollarding will require planning consent.



Bridge Street

The appraisal sets out the value and significance of Brandon Conservation Area providing a basis for local development policy and development control (planning) decisions. The appraisal will consider the contribution of local traditional materials, spaces between buildings, trees, hedges and boundary walls, public spaces and any views or vistas that contribute to the area.

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Brick wall in the High Street

Designation as a conservation area will not prevent new development or stifle economic development. It will encourage a high standard of design, the maintenance of existing buildings, and the retention of local and traditional features. In assessing any proposal for development the District Council will consider the relationship of the proposal to the street scene and require a design sympathetic to the character of the area that will enhance the best aspects of the conservation area.

Appraisal

Location & Context

Brandon is a market town on the Suffolk/Norfolk Border. It is built on well-drained sandy soil in the Little Ouse river valley. Brandon lies on a major regional communication link between North West Norfolk and Cambridgeshire at the lowest crossing place on the Little Ouse before the great expanse of the fens.



View along the Little Ouse

Around three sides of Brandon lay 50,000 acres of Thetford Forest, the largest area of lowland wood in England. Once solely a source of timber, Thetford Forest is now a major regional tourist attraction and activities centre.

The area around Brandon is the traditional sandy heath of Breckland or the Brecks, a tract of heath land that was lightly tilled for a few years and allowed to revert to its former condition. The name Breckland was coined in 1894 by W.G. Clarke a journalist of Thetford.



Thetford Forest

The Brecklands were the source two major historic economic activities in Brandon, flints and rabbits.

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Early Brandon developed along the southern approach to the river crossing and this area forms the heart of the conservation area. Modern Brandon has developed away from the river to the south. In 1968 the old Greater London Council entered into a Town Development Agreement resulting in a considerable expansion of Brandon through public housing. This marked the beginning of sustained increase in the population of Brandon. The population of Brandon in 2006 is a just less than 10,000.



View from Church End

General Character and Plan Form

The historic core of Brandon's physical character derives from its relationship to the Little Ouse, which has served over many centuries not only to bring the town into its existence, but also to shape the form of the settlement's early development. The river crossing has been a focal point for travellers.



View of the bridge at north end of High Street

It was much frequented by pilgrims on their way to and from the holy shrine at Walsingham and was, and still is, on the main route between the port of Kings Lynn and London.

Many of the large houses located on both sides of the Little Ouse are former coaching inns.



Old coaching inn 70 High Street

Landscape setting.

The centre of Brandon remains strongly linked to its historical communication routes, with major road links bisecting the town.

The links with the Brecklands and the Fens are less apparent and better appreciated on the approach roads from Thetford and from the North.

The finest views out of the town are seen from the bridge.

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Little Ouse

The river once formed the boundary between Suffolk and Norfolk, Brandon falling in the main on the Suffolk side. But then, as now, even though the border has since shifted to coincide with the present railway line, a small portion of Brandon has strayed over into neighbouring Norfolk including the railway station which is sited on the Norfolk side of the track.

Historic Development

Brandon was anciently known as Brandona, Brandona, Braundon, Brandones Ferye, Brandon Ferry and Brand.

The river, or more accurately, the lowest crossing place, was the reason for Brandon's beginning and the key to the settlements economic success for centuries. The first crossing was a ford, then a ferry, giving one of the many names to the settlement. A wooden bridge was built in the Middle Ages, replaced in the seventeenth century by a stone bridge, and in the 1950s, replaced again by the present bridge.



The old stone bridge across the little Ouse

Evidence of Neolithic, Iron Age, Bronze Age and Roman inhabitants have been discovered in and around Brandon.

Historically the commercial focus of Brandon was along Bridge Street and Ferry Street (known now as the High Street) servicing travellers on the road and river.



Early view of Ferry Street, now the High Street

Wharves were built near the river crossing and Brandon served as an inland port transferring goods from Kings Lynn and the navigable fens to smaller craft for the journey upriver. Ferry Street became a street of retailers, tradesmen, inns and merchants houses.

During the Napoleonic wars the trade in gunflints was the main economic activity. By the C19th the relationship with the river had encouraged a considerable trade in malt, timber and rabbit skins. The C19th also saw the expanded demand for napped flints for primarily house building.

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By the C20th the advantage of Brandon's position on the Little Ouse had long passed and the traditional trades had for various reasons fallen into decline. New industries chose other locations and economic development in Brandon slowed.

But everywhere you look in Brandon can be seen the legacy of at least one of these trades; flint napping.



Knapped flint work Church of St Peter

Flint houses and flint walls still survive in some number, though many more have been demolished or disfigured by modern alterations.

Archaeology

Scattered evidence indicates the presence of Neolithic, Iron Age, Bronze Age and Roman inhabitants in or around the present site of Brandon. The most important archaeology find was discovered in Staunch Meadow on the southern bank of the Little Ouse by Brandon Lock. Extensive excavations revealed the remains of a well established Middle Saxon settlement. This site on the edge of Brandon is one of the most important Anglo Saxon settlements yet discovered in the British Isles.



Church of St. Peter

Brandon's only listed Grade I building is the Church of St. Peter. The core of the chancel dates from the late C13. The church was restored 1873. Close to the church is the old Workhouse; converted to a school by the Victorians, it is now a house. There are seven listed buildings on the High Street. With the exception of a sixteenth century house at number 20

they are located at the river end of town. Connaught House, built in the early nineteenth century, Grafton House dating from the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century Grade II* Oak House at number 70 are all former Inns.



Connaught House High St former Coaching Inn

Spatial Analysis

Brandon has developed along several historic major roads that converged on the river crossing.

Walking down the High Street from Market Hill there are occasional glimpses of open land between buildings and along White Hart Lane. These gaps between the buildings permit only restricted views to the pasture and wooded Areas surrounding Brandon.

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The best views are from the bridge over the Little Ouse, reminders of Brandon's historical relationship with the river and its surroundings



Little Ouse

On both sides of the river are views of grazing lands, framed by wooded areas. On the south bank the views extend to Staunch Meadow the site of the Saxon settlement.

A short walk through White Hart Lane on the eastern side of the High Street gives access to more pasturelands and wooded areas. To the south of the Conservation Area on London Road there is a well-defined vista along Victoria Avenue leading to the St Peters Church, and the cemetery.

The new estates of houses and bungalows, devoid of any local features, conflict with the flint houses, which still remain.

Character Analysis

The High Street and Bridge Street

The High Street is the main commercial retail area of Brandon. The southern half has a continuous frontage of small scale two storey buildings. The majority of the buildings appear 18th and 19th century with several early 20th century shop fronts.



Restored front elevation 36 High Street

In the 18th and 19th centuries many timber frame buildings were altered with brick facades, new doors and windows, slate roofs and extensive interior updating. The remains of earlier timber frame

buildings dating from the medieval period to the 17th century can be found in many of the buildings. To the rear of the east side, is a run of medieval burgage plots.

Building facades are predominately brick, some rendered or painted, with pantiled and slated roofs.



C16th timber frame house with early C20th shop front 16-22 High Street

Many of the early 20th century shop fronts and 19th century sash widows have survived retaining the traditional character of the commercial area.

Further north towards the river and beyond, the building line is broken up by a number of larger buildings, several of them listed, standing on

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large plots allowing limited views between buildings.



Riverside Lodge High Street

As the river is approached the spacious open areas between buildings contain a number of mature trees.

Just over the bridge are the Ram Inn, a hostelry for nearly 500 years, and the Victorian Great Eastern Hotel, which is one of several buildings in Bridge Street that owe their existence the railway.

Market Hill

Market Hill is a pedestrian area and is the location of many community-based activities including the weekly market. Three unlisted buildings, the Flintnappers Public House, formally the Eagle, the red brick Victorian Old School and the adjacent



The Old School on Market Hill

flint building provide important visual relief from the otherwise modern buildings that dominate the open space.

London Road, Stores Street and School Lane

This area is notable for the variety of flint buildings and walls that have survived whilst so many other flint buildings in Brandon have been demolished. Flint is the characteristic feature most associated with Brandon's distinctive architectural style. Where these buildings have avoided inappropriate modernisation and retained the original features, including sash windows and chimneystacks, they constitute a strong link with Brandon's heritage and are highly valued by the community.



Old Methodist Church London Road

Notable buildings include the Old Methodist Church, now the Church of Christ, the old Police station, and behind the run of shops on the south side, a two-storey barn style

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workshop. On the north side is the old Victorian Fire Engine House.

Victoria Avenue

Victoria Avenue is believed to cross over the site of a Saxon-Norman settlement. It is edged on both sides of the footpath by lines of mature lime trees.



Victoria

Avenue

Intrusion and Damage

Brandon is fortunate that much of the external historic built environment has survived although the loss of internal fabric and features has been more alarming. There are a number of 20th century commercial buildings intruding on the historic streetscape along the High Street and Market Hill. They are buildings that are very representative of their time rather than a place. Their design has no reference to their historic setting.



Modern shops High Street

Brandon's historic area has been blighted by the proliferation of uPVC double glazed windows with the loss of many fine sash windows and traditional shop fronts. The last few years have seen the re-instatement of some of these lost features making a very definite contribution to the appearance of the retail area. Further loss of more traditional shop fronts would be a retrograde step affecting the character and appearance of the town.

Suggested Boundary Changes

The survey of Brandon for the appraisal was carried out in February 2006. Three areas for extending the Conservation Area have been considered.

The inclusion of the remainder of Victoria Avenue will provide added protection for the entire avenue of lime trees.



Church of St Peter and Churchyard

The Church and churchyard and part of Church End including the old parish workhouse is an area valued by the community for its contribution to the town. Its inclusion in the conservation area should guarantee the appearance and character of the immediate area in and around the church.

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*The Old School Church End
former parish workhouse*



Flint House Church Road

Conservation Area designation would generally not be an appropriate means of protecting the wider landscape along the river, comprising Stauch Meadow the playing fields and pasture lands. It is not proposed to include these areas in the conservation area.

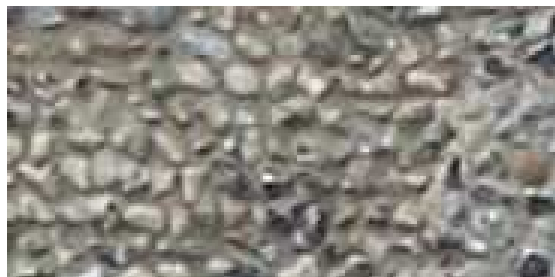
Management

Local Generic Guidance

In a Conservation area notable for the predominance of unlisted buildings, changes need to focus on understanding and assessing what the impact of a proposed change to an individual building, or site, will have on the character of the immediate area. Brandon's tradition of building in **Flint** is demonstrated by the varied examples of knapped



and unknapped flint work throughout the town. Very precise and highly decorative knapped flint work contrasts with cruder irregular flints. Traditionally flints are rarely laid in a random fashion but are carefully sorted and precisely laid in a distinct and recognisable pattern.



Repairs and restoration need to consider the variation in knapped and unknapped flint and the way they were laid. Traditionally flint was always laid in a lime mortar. Matching the mortar is as important to appearance of the finished work as the choice of flint. Flint work must never be painted or rendered.

Traditional timber windows, doors and shop fronts should be repaired, or replaced when necessary with exact like for like replacements.

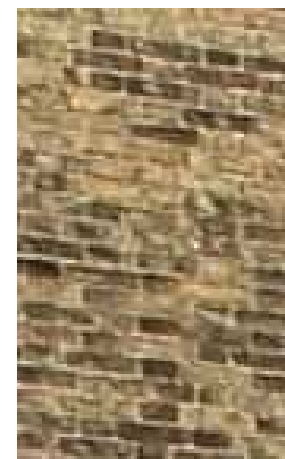


Oriel window 57 High Street

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Upvc windows will not be permitted. Replacing modern inappropriate windows in historic buildings should be considered.

Historic Brandon displays a range of soft red and gault **bricks** on its buildings all laid in lime mortar. Repairs and alterations should match both brick, usually Flemish bond, but not exclusively, and mortar. Repointing where required should match the lime mortar in colour texture and profile.



Unpainted and unrendered brickwork should never be painted or rendered.

Slate and clay tiled roofs should be retained. Hand made clay tiles should not be replaced with machine made tiles or worse with concrete tiles. English or welsh slate should not be replaced with imported slate and never with non-natural materials.



Roof detail Riverside Lodge High Street

Traditional roof details must be retained and where they have been lost, restored during re-roofing. Chimneystacks, pots and early dormers are important features of a roof scape and must be retained in their original form.



Dormer window High Street

Shop fronts of merit must be retained and repaired as an alternative to replacement.



Early C29th shop front inserted into C16th house 49/51 High Street

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Satellite dishes, meter boxes and burglar alarms should be carefully located in unobtrusive locations and not on prominent front elevations

Flint and brick boundary walls must be retained and repaired.



Flint boundary wall

Summary of Control Issues

Some planning controls exist to protect the character of listed buildings and commercial property where Permitted Development Rights do not apply. It is the role of Development Control, and where breaches of planning law occur, Planning Enforcement, to use the powers of the local Authority to protect the character and appearance of the historic centre.

Consideration, in consultation with the community, should be given to serving an Article 4 Direction on the Conservation Area. This would remove the Permitted development rights on domestic dwellings. An Article 4 Notice will require all owners or tenants of buildings in the conservation area to seek conservation area consent for any works scheduled in the Article 4 Direction. The notice could require consent for works that effect the streetscape elevation and the roofscape.



Upvc windows, satellite dish on C19th house in London Road

For example, this could give authority to the District Council to prevent the removal of traditional windows to be replaced with Upvc, the removal of chimneystacks and other architectural features, rendering or painting brick or flint work or the removal of boundary walls.



Flint and brick boundary wall Church Road

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The consultation has identified a desire by the community to protect the flint buildings not just in the conservation area but also throughout Brandon. For the most part the flint buildings are 19th century and unlisted.



Unlisted flint house in London road

Earlier flint buildings are likely to be listed. Consideration should be given to a Local List of all unlisted flint buildings in Brandon. A Local List would give the Local Authority limited powers to protect the external architectural features of the unlisted flint building.

New Development

There are few opportunities for new development in the boundary of the Conservation Area. A possible site is an orchard of 1.2 hectares off School Lane. There are limited public views into the open space and its importance to the character of the conservation area is limited. The site is however located immediately adjacent to the new school and the site of the new Healthy Living Centre. The future use of this site should consider its value as a public open space in the context of the new centre. The conservation area extends to the rear of the high street on the east side to the edge of Lode Street to include the extended rear plots that are underused as parking areas for the commercial units and limited residential along the High Street. For the most part this area is not well maintained and is in contrast to the new small-scale residential development on the opposite side of Lode Street. Residential development in this area should follow the existing pattern of near continuous frontage of small-scale two storey buildings.

Design of new development in the conservation area should be related to its context with the objective that it will both be valued by future generations as a positive contribution. Design of any new building should be appropriate to, and influenced by, its site, the character of the area and the best of the surrounding built environment. Extensions, conversions and alterations should not damage or devalue the existing building.

This does not imply that only local traditional design will be appropriate, but new design must

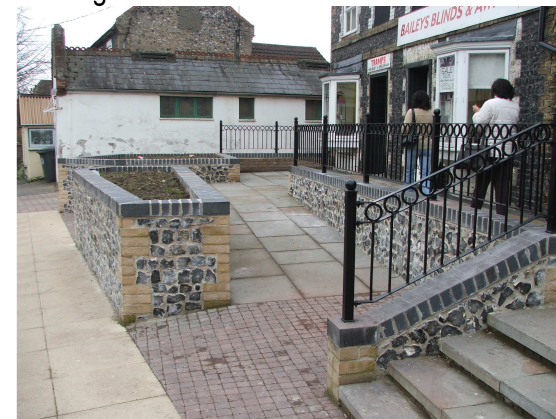


Old barn in School lane

respect the best values of the area by assessing what it is that gives a particular area its character. Crude imitations of adjoining buildings omitting the finer architectural detail that give historic buildings their intrinsic identity are unacceptable. Token gestures towards local architectural style, the flint panel in an otherwise standard estate house style, for example, should be avoided. The end product should be a building, which respects and preserves the local character of an area. A contemporary design, uncompromisingly modern, which can be satisfactorily integrated into the existing historic fabric, may be acceptable in Market Hill but only for a building, which demonstrates its qualities. The character of Brandon derives from its diversity with dominant themes in particular

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areas. The footprint of new buildings should relate to the existing street pattern of the area, including the pattern of spacing between buildings. Volume and scale, windows, doors, floors, chimneystacks should sit comfortably on the site and its relation with neighbouring buildings.



London Road Enhancement

As much thought should be given to the choice of materials. Materials generally should match or complement those that are historically dominant and must be of high quality. Flint and traditional brick bonds are important elements in the Brandon Conservation Area and their use should not be confined to decorative features grafted onto an otherwise unimaginative standard scheme, which does not respond to and respect its setting within the conservation area. Sample panels of new flint and brickwork should be available for inspection before work commences on new developments and repairs.

Opportunities

Traffic Congestion and volume is an ongoing problem for the town. Heavy traffic is a permanent factor along the High Street and has a particular impact in Bridge Street where the level crossing regularly brings traffic to halt backing up traffic with engines running to the bridge and beyond. Little can be done to alleviate this problem until the last single lane section of the A11 is rebuilt as a dual carriageway. Once this work is completed representations will be made to place a restriction on heavy traffic through Brandon.

Bridge Street is isolated from the rest of the town by the river crossing. The access points to the river from the High Street and Bridge Street are uninviting with minimal signage to encourage pedestrians



Level crossing Bridge Street

Bridge Street would benefit from an environmental improvement scheme to reinstate historic surfaces and provide and improve public spaces. Bridge Street has a number of existing refreshment outlets and these, together with attractive and inviting access routes to river walks, nature trails and boating, against the backdrop of a well designed landscaping programme could re-invigorate the area, if and when the traffic flow is reduced.

Market Hill is a focal point of the town, and the town centre's main public open space.



Market Hill

The area was pedestrianized in the mid 1980's. The redevelopment of the former Coop store to a bowling alley with a bar and restaurant has

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made a positive and major contribution to the area. The old primary school will soon be redeveloped as the Brandon Healthy Living Centre encouraging more public use of Market Hill. The existing unimaginative surface treatment and uninspiring street furniture offer opportunities to improve this space for the benefit of the community.

New surface dressing, sitting and meeting areas, removal of existing street furniture and promoting alfresco refreshment areas in the summer will be considered by the council in consultation with the local community.

Street furniture will be reduced by removing redundant or unnecessary poles, bins signs etc.

Road signs will be of appropriate character and quality. When ever possible signs will be fixed to existing posts or street furniture

Advertisements should be appropriate to the historic area. They need to be in scale and in character with both building and the area. Shop and trade signs should be integrated into the design of the shop front or the building as a whole. Internally illuminated box signs will not be permitted. Freestanding signage should display the same sympathetic standards as fix advertisements. Signs should not be displayed above the ground floor level. Corporate signage will not be accepted unless they meet all other requirements.

Monitoring

Changes in the appearance of the conservation area resulting from permitted or unauthorised alterations will be closely monitored and where appropriate enforcement action will be taken. The District Council will establish a policy of monitoring, review and enforcement action where unauthorised alterations occur.

The local community will be encouraged to help create an ongoing photographic record of the Conservation area and monitor changes.



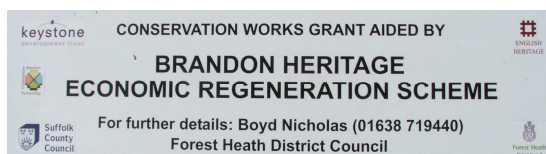
The Bell High Street

Brandon Conservation Area includes the main retail and commercial centre. Commercial properties are subject to frequent changes as new businesses start up and existing business develops.

The Conservation Area Appraisal is not intended to prevent alterations to commercial facades. Proposals for alterations must consider whether the contribution to the Conservation Area is positive and whether there is an opportunity for a significant enhancement to the area.

Resources

During the four years ending March 2006 £256,000 of grants from Central Government, (English Heritage and Keystone Development), and Local Government (Forest Heath District Council and Suffolk County Council), has been distributed by the Brandon Historic Economic Regeneration Scheme. These funds have been targeted at the repair of the commercial buildings and promoting new business.



Grants have been distributed to 16 buildings involving 22 businesses. The private investment during the lifetime of the scheme is estimated at over one and half million pounds.

Resources in the form of Historic Building Grants will be made available depending on the overall economic priorities of the Council. These priorities will change for year to year.

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When available grants may be available for works in the Conservation Area to repair architectural historic features and re-instate lost features if such work makes a positive contribution to the Conservation area.

The most important resources for any town are its local community and here Brandon can be proud of its recent achievements and confident of its future. The Brandon Community Partnership continues its excellent work attracting funds to the town and the redevelopment of the Old School on Market Hill to a Healthy Living Centre will make a significant contribution to the local economy along with the social benefits. New shops, a microbrewery, a ten pin bowling alley all testify to an optimistic future.



Mr G's Bowling Alley

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Useful Addresses

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) 37 Spital Square London E1 6DY. www.spab.org.uk
Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) High Street Tilbury SP3 6HA.. www.ihbc.org.uk
English Heritage Swindon SN2 2YP. www.english-heritage.org.uk
Suffolk Historic Buildings Group 1 Lady Street Lavenham CO10 9RA. www.shbgroup.com
Suffolk Preservation Society Little Hall Market place Lavenham CO10 9QZ. www.suffolksociety.com
Forest Heath District Council College Heath Road Mildenhall IP28 7EY. www.forest-heath.gov.uk