

A Village Design Statement

for

MONKS KIRBY

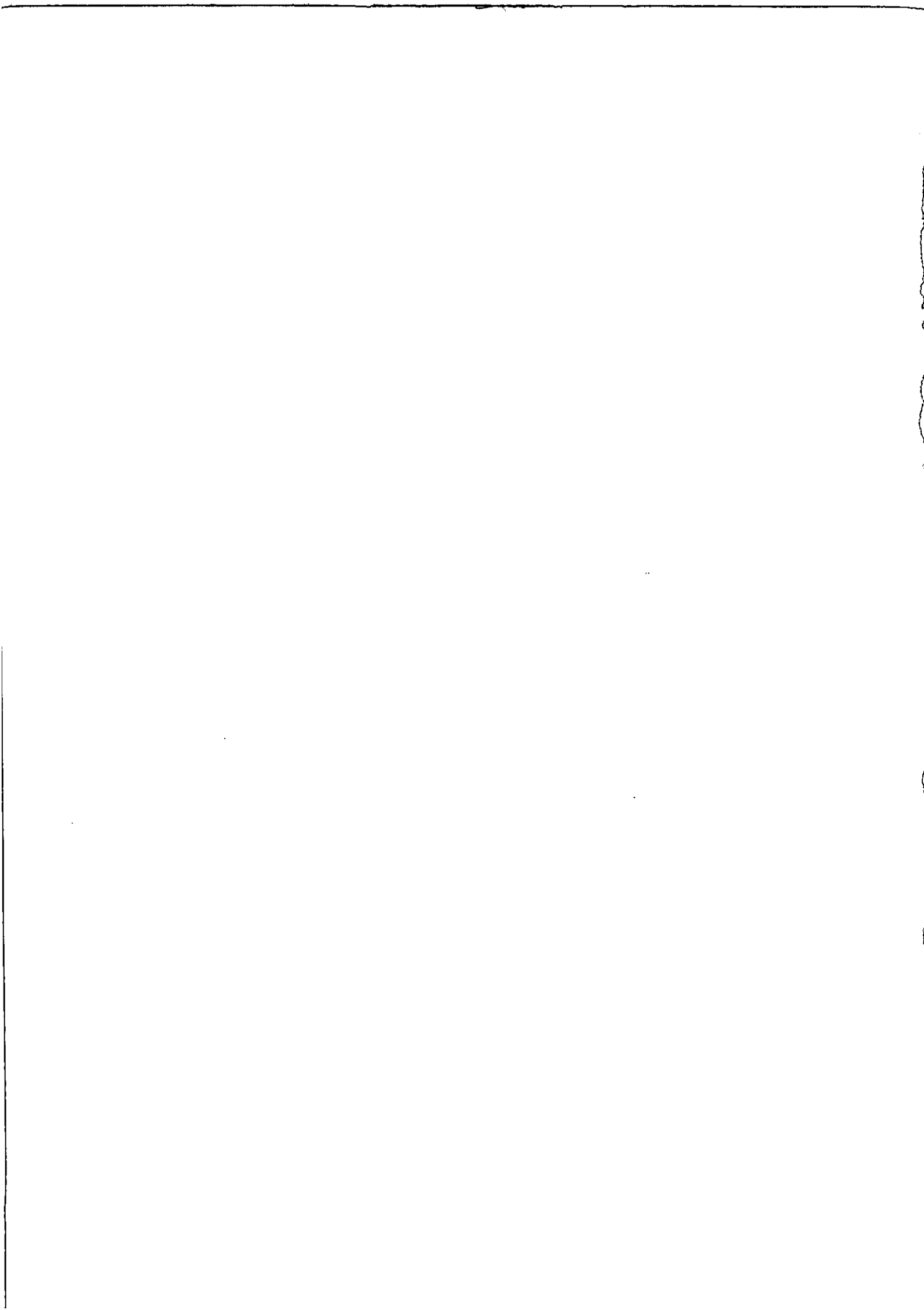


St Edith's Church

This Statement consists of two parts:

The first explains the purpose of a Village Design Statement and gives the various contexts – historical, social and legal – of Monks Kirby.

The second part describes the distinctive features of Monks Kirby as a village and, after each analysis, makes recommendations to guide future development. This part in particular is derived from consultation with village people, notably through the questionnaire and the village workshop.



Foreword

By The Earl of Denbigh

The Estate has always wanted to ensure good design in Monks Kirby. In the past weak planning laws and economic pressures have led to some insensitive demolition and to too much 'pattern-book' building. Now we live in an era that is more aware of our heritage; we recognise the need to conserve what is good and to build in sympathy with the past. Good modern design is not a rehash of old fashioned idioms, but it recognises the importance of scale, lay out, materials and detail. Good design will complement the existing features rather than conflict with them. We believe that high quality design has the capacity to influence for good the quality of life of those of us who have the privilege to live in the village. I hope that this Village Design Statement will contribute to the development of Monks Kirby as we look forward to the next millennium.

Denbigh

What is a Village Design Statement?

This Statement describes Monks Kirby as it is today, and highlights the qualities valued by its residents. It has been written by the villagers so that local knowledge, views and ideas may contribute to the growth and development of the village and to the high quality of its environment. The aim is to ensure that further building and change will be based on a considered understanding of the village's past and present, and will contribute positively to the future of Monks Kirby.

Who Is It For?

Change is brought about not only by large developments but also by the smaller, day-to-day adjustments to homes and gardens, open spaces, paths and hedgerows, which alter the look and feel of the whole village. The Statement is therefore addressed to:

- Statutory bodies and public authorities
- Planners, developers, builders, architects, designers
- Local community groups
- Householders.

How Does The Design Statement Work?

The Statement has been adopted by Rugby Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance and its recommendations will be taken into account when applications are assessed. In this way it will support the Local Plan and assist the work of the Parish Council.



A Short History of the Village

Before the Norman Conquest Kirby was one of the estates held by Lewin but it then passed, probably by marriage, to Geoffrey de Wirce. Geoffrey rebuilt the church and on 1 July 1077 gave it with a considerable amount of land to the monks of Angers. During the thirteenth century the priory prospered and Henry III granted the monks a Midsummer Fair as well as a weekly market. In 1396, during the Hundred Years War, the Priory was transferred to a new English order of Carthusians at Axholme. At the Dissolution the Priory passed to the King while the Manor was granted to the Bishop of Ipswich. The benefice was given to Trinity College, Cambridge, who still maintain it, while the land passed eventually by marriage to Mary, Countess of Buckingham. She settled it on her relative, Basil, Lord Feilding, who was created Earl of Denbigh in 1622. The Feilding family had owned Newnham Paddox since 1433. Photographs in the Denbigh Arms and in the Village Hall show scenes of the village in the 1920's. The general layout is certainly visible today, but most of the thatched and half-timbered cottages which lined Bell Lane, Bond End and

Millers Lane have been swept away to make room for modern housing. In the past twenty-five years there have been several building phases: Bell Lane, St Edith's Close, 14-26 (even) Brockhurst Lane, Smite Close, Stocking Meadow and Gate Farm have completely altered the balance of the housing stock. In addition there have been several in-fill developments. Within the village boundary there are 51 pre-Second World War houses as compared with 69 post war dwellings (of which 3 are conversions of former farm buildings). Today the village has a strong sense of community with newcomers welcomed and mixing easily with the old village families. Most villagers of working age commute to Rugby, Coventry, Leicester or further afield. We are situated at the heart of the English motorway network and have good rail and air communications. Within the village there are two pubs, two churches (the imposing parish church of St Edith and the new Roman Catholic St Joseph's), a convent, a post office and shop, a village hall and the primary school for the surrounding area.

The Landscape Setting

Monks Kirby is situated two miles south of the watershed that separates the Trent and Severn catchment areas. The high ground to the north is comparatively flat with large open fields now mainly arable, punctuated by occasional stands of timber. The mantle of the plateau is of thick glacial drift, comprising clays, gravels and sands. The village lies in a south facing shallow valley where until recently the heavy soil gave impeded drainage. Recent agricultural policy has removed many of the eighteenth century field boundaries and has installed modern land drainage systems. Originally Monks Kirby and its neighbour Brockhurst were distinct settlements separated by low lying marshland. The road that now connects them is in fact built on a causeway. The village is drained by the Smite Brook which rises two or three miles to the north-east and forms the southern boundary of the village. Originally this meandered through boggy water meadows but it has now been straightened and excavated. A small tributary flows southwards down the Monks Kirby valley and separates the twin villages.

Monks Kirby lies at a crossroads. Twin lanes lead northwards from Brockhurst and Monks Kirby to the High Cross plateau giving access to Lutterworth, the M1 North and the A5.

Westwards Millers Lane leads up to the Fosse Way and across to Withybrook and Nuneaton. Southwards the main exit from the village is through Street Ashton where the B4027 accesses Coventry, Rugby, the Fosse Way south and the M6 to the west. There is also a well used bridleway which continues the line of Bell Lane over to the neighbouring village of Pailton. In spite of this easy egress in every direction there is very little through traffic.

The twin settlements nestle in the valley folds, almost invisible from every direction from more than a couple of hundred yards. Only the Church, built on a knoll projecting out from the rising ground on the west, indicates the presence of the village. Most of the other village buildings are sited with respect for the gentle contours, and are anyway screened by the surrounding fields' hedgerows and the surviving forest trees.



The Rugby Local Plan

Monks Kirby is identified as a "limited infill village" under the terms of the Rugby Local Plan (June 1997). A village boundary has been drawn reasonably tightly round the main features of the village.

Outside the boundary lies the Green Belt which forms the eastern fringe of the West Midlands/Warwickshire Green Belt that surrounds

Birmingham and Coventry. Here restraint policies apply which means that planning permission for residential development will not normally be given. The village within the boundary is exempted from the Green Belt restrictions, and so infill development may be acceptable subject to meeting other policies and standards.

The Conservation Area

The village was designated a Conservation Area in 1970. The Area is considerably larger than the village boundary adopted in the Local Plan and includes many of the fields surrounding the village itself.

The aim of a Conservation Area is to protect the area as a whole, not merely the individual buildings. Planning controls on works to properties in a Conservation Area are more restrictive than elsewhere. In addition to normal planning controls permission is required for the following:

- Demolition of all or part of a building; demolition of a wall, gate or fence greater

than 1 m high fronting a highway or greater than 2 m elsewhere;

- Extensions to a dwelling;
- dormer windows or alterations to a roofline; most forms of cladding; outbuildings greater than 10 m³; erection of fences or walls greater than certain heights; erection of satellite dishes or aerials where they affect the roofline;
- Lopping or felling any tree more than 7.5 cm diameter at a height of 1.5 m. The Authority may issue a Tree Preservation Order if they consider it has amenity value. (There are presently no TPO's in the village.)

Listed Buildings

Additional controls apply to Listed Buildings. The following buildings within the Village Boundary are presently listed:

- Much of The Revel School playing field which originally formed part of the parkland of Newnham Paddock designed by Capability Brown is listed as "garden and other land of historic interest" by English Heritage;

- St Edith's Church is listed Grade I;
- 25 and 26 Bond End (Honeysuckle Cottage and Kingsley Cottage) are listed Grade II;
- 6 and 8 Main Street are listed Grade II;
- 12 to 20 (even) Main Street are listed Grade II;
- The Old Post Office is listed Grade II.

Part II – The Distinctive Features of Monks Kirby

Monks Kirby is distinguished by its sense of space and openness. From every direction outside the village the tower of St Edith's Church attracts the eye, and within the village itself the church is visible from almost every viewpoint. Views out of the village are equally important. A walk through the village streets gives continually changing views of open countryside; we are constantly aware of the village setting within the shallow valley.



Views into the Village

- From Street Ashton (the main entrance to the village) St Edith's stands dominant over the water meadows of the Smite Brook. Particularly important features are the willow trees that mark the ancient sheepdip and the hedgerows that surround the former fishponds. There is an interesting pattern of rising roofs from Kirby Gate and the Denbigh Arms.
- There is a similar view up to the church from the Pailton bridlepath. Here the maturing front gardens of Bell Lane frame the roof ensemble of the Denbigh Arms, the oak trees, and the yews in the churchyard.

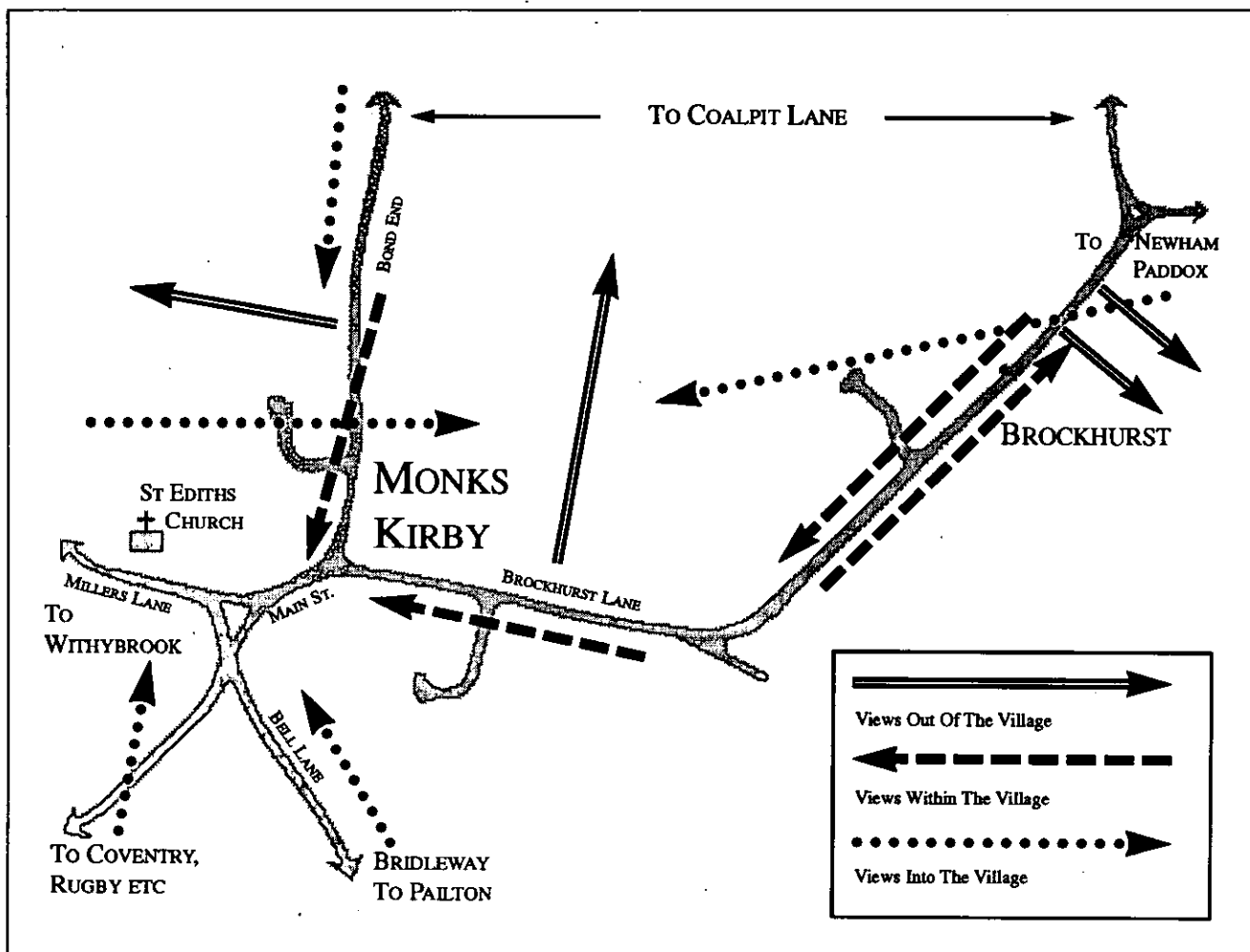
- Millers Lane gives a view of the way Monks Kirby nestles in the valley, sheltered by the trees and hedgelines of the surrounding fields. The separation of Monks Kirby from Brockhurst can be clearly seen.
- From the north the twin lanes leading down from Coalpit Lane give views of St Edith's on its knoll, whereas the village itself is scarcely visible behind the hedges and trees.
- The view from Newnham Paddock Drive across Brockhurst up to Monks Kirby illustrates the harmony of the village setting.
- Many of the network of ancient footpaths which crisscross the valley provide views of the village and the church.

Sightlines within the Village

- From the entrance to Brockhurst Lane there is a very English rural vernacular scene with the half-timbered black and white cottages on the left, the nineteenth century brick cottages on the right, leading to the brick churchyard wall and the garden of the Denbigh Arms.
- There is an attractively composed view from the War Memorial in Brockhurst Lane towards the village centre, past the mainly open front gardens of the modern houses on the left, the open fields on the right and over the gently rising succession of rooflines of Smite Close, the "Dutch" houses and Main Street.
- The half-timbered cottages of Main Street with the fine thatched roof of the Old Post Office can be viewed well from Bond End
- framed by the structurally important Butcher's Shop on the left and the modern single ridged houses of St Edith's Close on the right.
- The church stands well on the rising ground above St Edith's Close.
- The views up Brockhurst Lane north from the War Memorial and south from the entry to Newnham Paddock give a strong impression of the way the original settlement utilised the higher ground east of the marsh that separated Brockhurst from Monks Kirby.

Views out of the Village

- From the top of Brockhurst Lane there are views in to the parkland of Newnham Paddock designed in the mid eighteenth century. We can also see across the Smite valley and up to the rising ground towards Pailton.
- From here too we can see the fields that separate Monks Kirby from Brockhurst that form an integral feature of the Conservation Area.
- In the north part of Brockhurst Lane there are wide gaps between the older houses which offer views of open countryside which seems to push its way right in to the settlement itself.
- The view from the causeway of Brockhurst Lane across the pasture land north is of open fields above the village. One advantage of the modern removal of many hedgerows is that the shape of the land can now be seen.
- From Bond End there are clear views westwards up to the Fosse.
- From the Village Green there are views down Bell Lane, past The Bell Inn to the bridleway to Pailton; and across The Hays to Street Ashton.



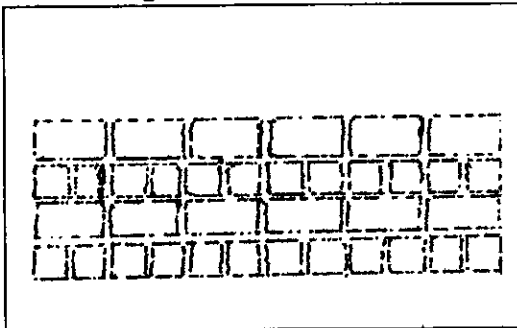
Recommendations

- The willows on The Hays which mark the site of the ancient sheepdip should be preserved and maintained.
- The manmade declivities that may have been ancient fishponds should be cleared out.
- Attention should be given to planting native woodland trees to the west of Bell Lane to soften the impact of the modern housing; in the hedges of the road from Street Ashton to replace the lost elms; and in the derelict strip of land to the north of the new development of Gate Farm.
- A new function should be sought for the Butcher's Shop so that this important building does not deteriorate further.
- **New buildings should be sited where they protect sightlines, taking great care that by their height and position they do not stand proud of existing buildings and they do not block important views into or out of the village.**

Building Materials and Styles

Very varied building styles are represented in the village. Monks Kirby has accumulated over the centuries and there is little homogeneity. There are sixteenth century half-timbered houses, but only one of these is now thatched. There are two surviving eighteenth century farmhouses but whereas one is a quite imposing edifice the other is very much in the cottage style. There is a sprinkling of nineteenth century cottages, several in the gothic style but the remainder in the rural vernacular.

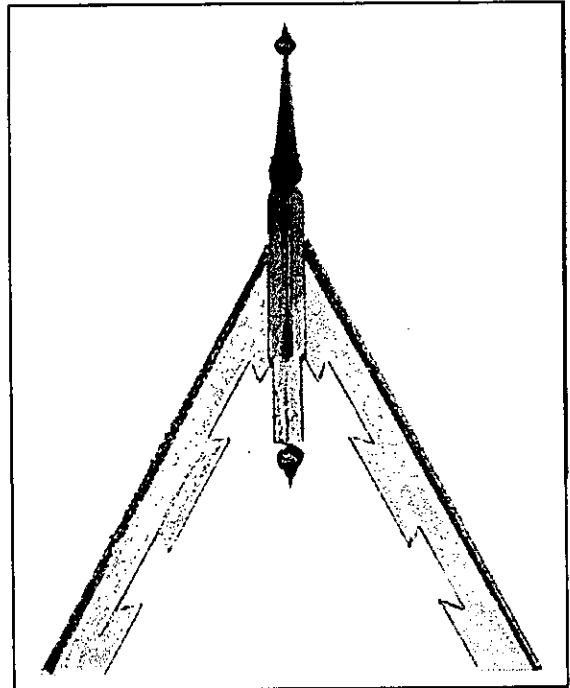
- Locally produced brick predominates. It gives a mellow, variegated texture often with the stretchers and headers alternating in the English style. Several houses have thin delicate lime mortar pointing. Window and door lintels are of brick, often arched and there are some good examples of squint brickwork around window and door reveals. One pair of cottages has excellent examples of rubbed brick lintels. Windows do not dominate; rather they add texture to the brick facades. Window frames are set within the window reveals giving an impression of depth. Lights are divided into small panes. There are good examples of brick dentil work on gable-ends avoiding the need for wooden barge-boards. The barn gable end at Brockhurst Farm has a splendid dove-cote feature. Some houses have been painted in stone texture paint. This at least has the advantage that the outline of the brick



courses can still be identified.

- Roofs are tiled or slated. Most are steeply pitched but to avoid height first floor windows on many of the cottages are dormered (this idiom has been copied in some of the post-war developments, most notably in Stocking Meadow). There are several houses with decorative – even elaborate – bargeboards. Some have turned finials. Roof verges and eaves often broadly overhang the walls giving depth and texture. Chimneys are important features, breaking the regularity of the roofline and adding interest to the silhouette.
- Building technology limitations meant that many of the pre-twentieth century houses were comparatively shallow in depth; and to

provide extensive accommodation it was necessary to build gabled wings at right angles to the main axis. Recent owners have



continued this approach in modern extensions. They have successfully imitated the original design features, sometimes by stepping the roofline to avoid unbalancing the mass of the original structure and sometimes by constructing a gabled extension to the rear.

- Many of the older properties have porches to their front doors. There are some nicely balanced tiled examples supported by gallows brackets; and there are several gracefully glazed enclosed porches under slate roofs. These were presumably nineteenth century additions.
- The patterning of the houses is also important – and varied. In Brockhurst, for example, many of the houses are pairs of semi-detached with broad open gardens separating each pair. There are two former farmhouses and two dwellings have been converted from former agricultural buildings. None is greater than two storeys high and the scale is therefore restricted and

informal. Nonetheless, each is built directly on to the road – or with a narrow strip of front garden behind a low wall – and this gives a sense of intimacy and community. However, at the centre of the village in Main Street and the entrance to Brockhurst Lane the texture is denser with fewer, smaller gaps between the buildings. The houses here are themselves more compact; they too are built directly on to the road. There is here a more enclosed feel with even a sense of busy-ness (and of course parking problems).

- The ancient pattern of roads and footpaths remains very strongly the basic structure of

the village. The fact that there is very little through traffic coupled with the fact that so many houses open directly on to the streets have immense influence on the lifestyle of the village as a whole. All the roads lead somewhere and there is a variety of circuits available for recreational walks. Neighbours therefore meet each other regularly to chat and pass the time of day. Children can safely be allowed to play out even though there is no designated play area. Social life is to a major extent defined by what is in effect a street village.

It is however the mixture of styles that characterises the village scene. What coherence there is derives from the way each group of buildings contribute their own distinctive features to the whole composition.

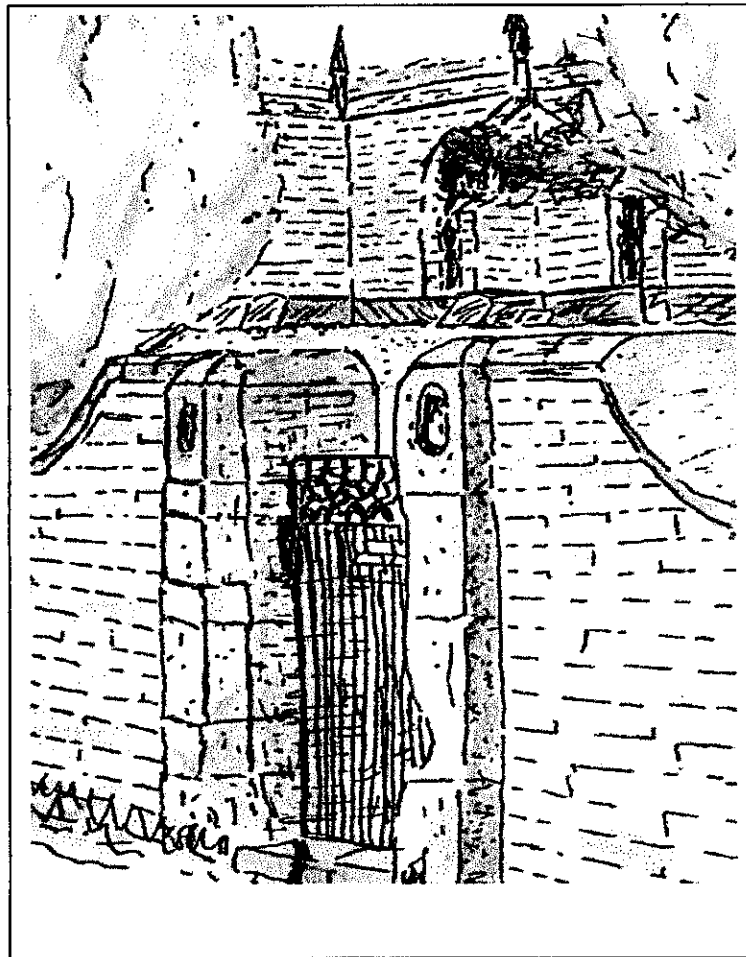
Recommendations

- Avoid too many houses of one style which will swamp the variety of the village. Seek always to avoid standardisation .
- Maintain the building line. Seek to preserve gaps between buildings where these are a feature of the village.
- Avoid any building work that requires the demolition of important pre-twentieth century brickwork.
- Avoid over dominant houses which will dwarf earlier cottages. Seek ways to break up large masses into smaller sections; use dormer windows or projecting gables to avoid excessive height.
- New buildings must have adequate off-road parking.
- Avoid thick mortar courses. Much of the village's early brickwork has tooled or bucket-handle pointing.
- Seek to provide interest in brickwork, possibly by the occasional projecting brick course, perhaps by brick lintels, possibly by coloured patterning where this is appropriate.
- Avoid concrete roof tiles (except for extensions where these are the original roofing medium).
- Seek to add variety to roof lines; where appropriate make a feature of chimneys.
- Avoid over dominant picture windows on to the road. Avoid the use of large panes. Recess window frames into window reveals.
- Avoid the use of boxed-in verges and eaves; seek alternatives such as plain bargeboards perhaps with simple moulding; or extended rafter feet; or brick dentil work.
- Plan extensions imaginatively, seeking to preserve the mass of the existing building and using appropriate materials and design features.
- Cul de sacs are not appropriate planning devices in that they can tend to form inward looking groupings separate from the more open social intercourse of the village as a whole.
- If an opportunity presents itself – perhaps through planning gain – a high priority should be put on the designation of a children's play area.
- **New buildings and alterations to existing buildings should seek to harmonise in siting, design and materials with the vernacular of the village.**

Street Style

- 1920's photographs of Monks Kirby show a rural settlement with metalled roads set between grass verges. There were no kerbs or footpaths.
- All the lanes leading into the village are still like this with the verges being roughly mown. Within the village itself, however, there are now kerbs and, generally, footpaths beside the roads. Until recently the kerbstones were of granite but many of these have unfortunately now been replaced, sometimes with a composition stone (which is quite effective), but more generally with concrete (which is not).
- Elsewhere there are no footpaths: this is the case, for instance, on the inside of the bend opposite the war memorial. Here the grass verge is kept roughly mown. In some of the new developments (Bell Lane, Smite Close, St Edith's Close, Stocking Meadow) there are also no footpaths; but here homeowners keep the lawns closely mown and neatly tend their front gardens. This open plan effect contrasts with the enclosed building lines of the older parts of the village.
- The footpaths themselves are of asphalt; there is a merciful absence of urban flagstones.

- In the older parts of the village the building line fronts on the highway, although a few houses do have small front gardens. Many of these are fronted by a low wall or hedge which give the impression of continuing the building line along the line of the street. This sense of enclosure is an important feature of the village. One very important wall surrounds the churchyard. Here the dull red, nineteenth century brickwork topped with stone cappings contributes strongly to the village's rural atmosphere.



- The lighting of Monks Kirby is not designed to meet official street lighting standards. It is described as "footpath lighting" to enable pedestrians to find their way. Some of the lights are mounted on convenient buildings and some on wooden poles. There are only a few modern aluminium lampposts. Most telephone wires run overhead from distribution poles; this is also the case with the electricity supply of some buildings in the centre of the village. These poles and cables give a cluttered appearance.

- The newly built roads have modern aluminium street name signs, and the old red telephone box has been replaced by an inappropriate modern design of glass and steel. There are, however, some good examples of traditionally designed street furniture: there is a splendid early twentieth century finger post on the village green, and the new signs for Brockhurst Lane have an appropriate look.
- Road markings have been kept to a minimum compatible with road safety.
- There are some important communal open spaces within and near the village: the Village Green, the triangle with its oak trees

(doctored after wide consultation in 1997-8), the churchyard itself, the wide verges with the recent tree planting beyond Bond End, the birches planted on the causeway of Brockhurst Lane to celebrate the jubilee of the WI, the refurbished war memorial, the triangle island at the top of Brockhurst Lane, the limetrees in front of the Catholic cemetery and the cemetery itself with the Victorian chapel, the Revel School's playing fields with their designated conservation area – all these are important features of the village street scene.

Recommendations

Replies to the questionnaire which formed the basis of this Statement were almost unanimous in their desire to avoid any further creeping suburbanisation. The overwhelming wish of respondents was to maintain the rural character of the village.

- Maintain the rough mown verges of the lanes leading into the village. Avoid the installation of kerbstones; or, if these are required for reasons of safety, install flush kerbs which will allow the grass to creep over the road edge.
- Within the village preserve the surviving granite setts. Avoid concrete which is too urban.
- When footpaths are resurfaced it may be appropriate to give them a pea gravel finish to break up too wide an expanse of asphalt.
- Where the building line is close to the highway seek to maintain the sense of enclosure by the use of walls, hedges, gates, etc. On the other hand, where housing is set well back seek to preserve the sense of space by leaving the front gardens open.
- Where walls fronting the highway are in need of maintenance seek specialist advice on the most appropriate techniques. Clumsy repointing with the wrong mortar can be very unsightly and can damage the bricks.
- Seek over time to replace aluminium signs and lampposts with more appropriate designs.
- Where security lighting is required seek to minimise its impact on surrounding property and on passers by.
- Urge the phone and electricity utilities to run their service cables underground.
- The open spaces of the village do not need to be closely mown or gardened. That is not the village style. But all should receive occasional maintenance to prevent them becoming overgrown.

Prepare your own Conservation Assessment

If you are considering altering the exterior of your property, changing any external detail of the building, its paintwork, signs, garden, or surrounds, then:

1. Look at the frontage from some distance. Note down the distinctive features and, separately, those that seem to be more recent and out of character with the building and surrounding properties; perhaps take some photographs;
2. Now stand right in front of the property and do the same, but this time study the details of the windows, doors, eaves and so forth;
3. Repeat these processes for each elevation or aspect of the property after studying the ideas in this Design Statement;
4. Now consider the changes you have in mind. Consider whether they would prejudice the distinctive characteristics and details which you have noted. If so, examine other ways of meeting your requirements – but which conserve this heritage.
5. Next check whether the changes you envisage will assist in removing any of the uncharacteristic features you have noted.
6. Finally go to your builder or architect and ask whether they agree with your conservation assessment or perhaps they have better ideas on how to achieve your objective.

Thank you for helping to conserve Monks Kirby.

Summary of Principles of Guidance

- Care should be taken to conserve the character of the village edges by maintaining existing trees and hedgerows and by a programme of replanting.
- New buildings should be sited where they contribute to the harmony of the sightlines.
- The design of new buildings and new extensions should recognise the small scale of most of the existing village buildings.
- The choice of materials for new buildings should be in keeping with the vernacular rural idiom.
- Care should be taken to maintain the rural nature of the street scene.



Letter of Support from Rugby Borough Council

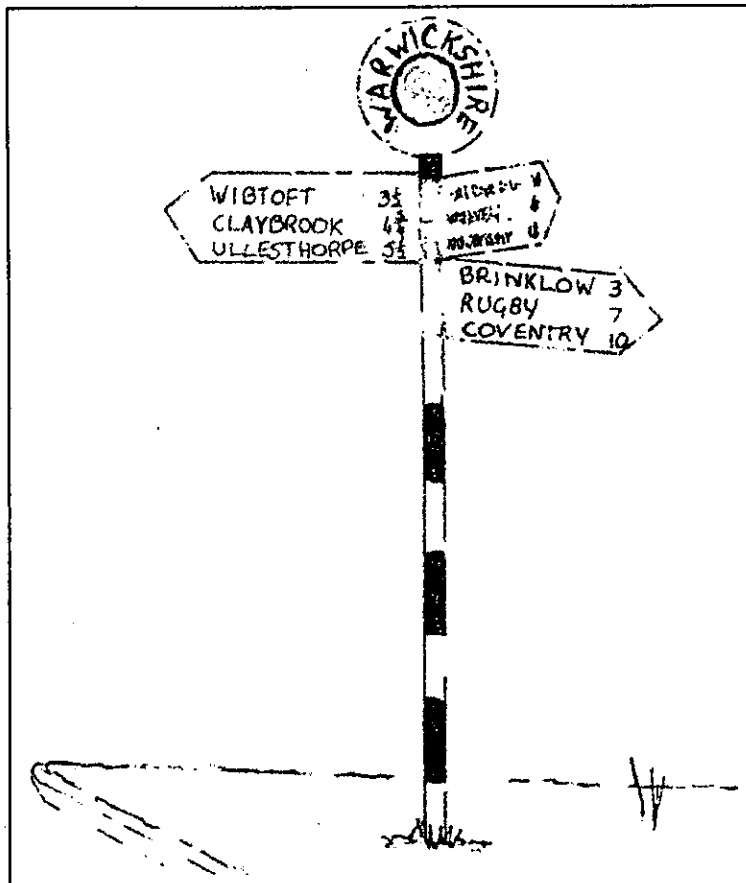
I would like to commend the hard work and efforts that have been put into this document. It is obvious that the village as a whole cherishes the quality of its environment and hopes to protect and enhance its character for the future.

Quality affects us all and each of us has a responsibility to our neighbours. Architecture is the only art form that is inescapable. Since most of our days are spent in or around buildings they have a great influence on our lives and therefore alterations or developments require careful thought to maintain the special qualities of Monks Kirby.

Good 'urban design' can reinforce a sense of community and where attention is given to detail, whether in street signs, landscaping or architecture, our experience of the whole environment is enriched and the quality of our lives improved.

I welcome this Village Design Statement therefore as an informative expression of local people's views which will guide the design process in new buildings or alterations and complement and strengthen the Planning Authority's responsibilities.

Ray Kirby, Chairman of Planning Committee



Further details of The Conservation Area, listed buildings and the Rugby Local Plan can be obtained from Rugby Borough Council.

The Village Design Statement has been produced by a committee of villagers of Monks Kirby under the auspices of the Parish Council. We have been assisted in the work by officers of Rugby Borough Council and by Warwickshire Rural Action.