



Conservation Area Appraisal

May 2017

Town End, Cronton Conservation Area

Foreword

The Conservation Area Appraisal Plan should be read in junction with the following documents or their successors:

Town End, Cronton Conservation Area Management Plan (2017);

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012);

National Planning Practice Guidance;

Knowsley Local Plan: Core Strategy (2016) including saved policies from the Knowsley Unitary Development Plan (2006);

Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The omission of mention of any building, site or feature should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Town End, Cronton conservation area

Cronton is an attractive rural village located in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley situated some seven miles west of Warrington and ten miles east of Liverpool city centre. Surrounded by designated Green Belt land, the village is easily accessible from the M62 and M57. Although it sits just outside of the urban area of Widnes, Cronton retains something of a pastoral and rustic atmosphere. The Town End, Cronton conservation area centres on the former hamlet of Town End and features an array of historical buildings of varying architectural styles ranging from a bold and imposing Georgian manor house, to handsome sandstone barns. Arable land surrounds the village and the former sandstone quarry of Pex Hill, now a pretty wooded recreational area, overlooks the site. The Town End, Cronton conservation area was designated on 16th March 1978.



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Figure 1- Map showing the location of Town End, Cronton in the Liverpool City Region, indicated by the blue star.

1.2 Planning Policy Context

Conservation areas are designated under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The overall definition of a Conservation Area is stated within the same Act as, “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 makes it the duty of any Local Planning Authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their conservation areas. Additionally, Section 72 specifies that in making a decision on an application for development within a conservation area, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or the appearance of that area.

National government policy regarding conservation areas is set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) (NPPF) supported by National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). Knowsley Council has also set out its local policy through the Local Plan Core Strategy (2016), particularly Policy CS20: Managing the Borough’s Historic Environment and DQ5: Development in Conservation Areas which is a saved policy within the Unitary Development Plan (2006).

In recognition of the statutory requirement stated within the Act and the policies of the NPPF, this appraisal identifies and assesses the special architectural and historic interest of the Town End, Cronton conservation area, in line with Historic England’s Advice Note 1: ‘Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management’.

2 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

2.1 Location and Setting

Traditionally part of Lancashire, Cronton is a rural settlement located in the county of Merseyside in the Borough of Knowsley. Cronton is located approximately ten miles from Liverpool city centre and lies within a few miles of both the M57 and the M62. Cronton is approximately two miles from Widnes Railway Station with good links to Liverpool and Manchester. The towns of Prescot and Huyton are approximately 4 miles north of Cronton.

The conservation area is centred on the former hamlet of Town End. This settlement was once separate from Cronton as a concentrated but loosely grouped hamlet in an agricultural setting. Nowadays Town End retains this general form but forms the northern edge of the centre of Cronton.

Town End, Cronton lies at the convergence of a number of routes making it an ideal settlement, well-connected for early cottage industries. It can be accessed from several roads: Hall Lane runs through the village north to east, Penny Lane from the west and Smithy Lane from the south. Hall Lane is a narrow road and the entrance to the Conservation Area benefits from a low-lying tree canopy creating an interesting and quaint vista in and out of the conservation area. Both Hall Lane and Penny Lane head out of the conservation area past farm land free of construction, creating a sense reminiscent of the agricultural way of life that was once prevalent here. Smithy Lane is more urbanised and heads out of the conservation area past more modern 20th century properties. Adjacent to Cronton Hall a footpath known as Wrights Lane is still in existence and leads through open countryside north to Rainhill Stoops. This footpath is reminiscent of an earlier age and appears to have been largely unchanged with open fields beyond the hedgerows and numerous tall trees standing overhead.

Further west of the conservation area lays the remains of Cronton Colliery. The Hulton Colliery Company gave orders for the construction of the mine in 1913 and the first batch of coal was extracted in April 1915. By the time Cronton Colliery finally closed in 1984 it had been making substantial financial losses and the remaining coal reserves were both limited and problematic to mine. The 43 hectares site lay derelict for years until it 1995 when the site was partially restored with woodland planting. There are plans to create a country park on the site.

The countryside around Cronton is designated as Green Belt. This designation has helped to ensure the survival of Cronton as a separate and distinguishable settlement. The immediate area around Cronton remains agricultural and historic field systems are legible with few additions or major alterations.



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Figure 2- Map showing the area covered by the Town End, Cronton conservation area, in the wider context of Cronton Village, indicated by the blue star.

2.2 Topography and Geology

The conservation area sits within gently undulating countryside that gently rises from south to north. The M62 bounds the township to the North with some areas of woodland to the west, and Pex Hill to the east. This hill rises to 200 feet above sea level and is a local landmark. It is covered with heather and gorse. At its summit are the Widnes Corporation reservoirs dating from 1868. The hill has been popular with cyclists for many years and today forms part of Mersey Forest. There was once a windmill at this location as evidenced by financial records from the medieval era, but no physical trace of the structure remains.

Pex Hill is also believed to have been the site of a sandstone quarry since the 17th century. The quarry is no doubt the source of stone from which many of the buildings in the conservation area were built, giving the buildings their locally distinctive and vernacular character. The land in this area consists of stunted oak woodland surrounded by heathland.

A tributary of Fox's Bank Brook springs to the northeast and flows through the centre of the conservation area via a stream known as Dog Clog Brook.

Some pebble beds outcrop in the north of Cronton and the remaining area is overlain by boulder clay. There is an early 19th century reference to Cronton Hall in a local newspaper advertisement referring to the property as 'Brook Stones'. This may have been a reflection as to the geology of the locality and the nearby brook. Sandstone from in and around this location dates from the Triassic Period.



Figure 3 – Site of the former Sandstone Quarry at Pex Hill, Cronton established in the 17th century.

3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Historical Development

It is widely believed that the name Cronton derives from the Saxon name 'Crawenton' meaning 'Settlement of Crows.' However, the name is more likely to derive from Old English terms *Crhō +ing + tun*, meaning 'farmstead at the place with a nook.' The 'nook' could refer to the settlement's location in relation to Pex Hill. The community appears as a small village in the Norman landholdings document the Testa de Nevill and is also mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1066 as part of the hundred of Warrington, which was later known as the West Derby Hundred that covered most of south west Lancashire.

The 'Town End' name of this part of Cronton relates to its location at the edge of the cluster of farmsteads that made up the community. 'Town' in this sense is any small cluster of buildings rather than our modern-day meaning of the word. The presence of both the Hall and ancient cross in Town End, and the survival of buildings from earlier periods suggest it is older than the 'Cronton' settlement which was originally concentrated further south, around the Cronton crossroads. In the 12th century the township was in control of Matthew, son of William. In 1250 it was given by Edmund de Lacy to Stanlaw Abbey as alms.

The abbot of Stanlaw is later recorded as being involved in boundary disputes in the fourteenth century. There is also archaeological evidence to suggest that open field agriculture had been practised in this area at this time. The Abbey retained ownership until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1537 when the manor (which included the Hall and tenant farms) was held by the Crown and was later sold to Thomas Holt of Gristlehurst. When the Holts' ownership of the manor ceased in 1587 the manor was described as containing 20 messuages (houses or cottages with associated land), two mills and 500 acres of land. For over a century the lands passed through a succession of owners until the mid-17th century when it came into ownership of the Wright family who were to be long term holders of the manor.

Their impact on the area survives in the name of Wrights Lane that runs past the Hall and towards Rainhill Stoops, and Wrights Farm on Hall Lane. Successive generations of the family lived at Cronton Hall until 1821 when it was again sold, this time to Mr Bartholomew Bretherton of Rainhill who enlarged the house and grounds. The property remains standing and is undoubtedly the most dominant structure in the whole conservation area. The Hall dates from the early 18th century and boasts a set of imposing wrought iron gates. These have been Grade II listed since 1952.



Figure 4 – Cronton Hall’s Grade II listed wrought iron gates, dating back to early 18th century with Cronton Hall partially visible in the background.

Town End’s distinctly rural setting survived until the mid-twentieth century when mass housing enveloped the southern and eastern sides of Town End. Maps from the 1960s show several housing estates appear on previously undeveloped land and the introduction of new residential zones such as The Ridgeway, Iver Close, Hampton Drive, Malton Close and others. Most noticeably previously vacant land to the west of Cronton Hall now features a number of raised bungalows set back from the main road, along with parking bays.

Pex Hill overlooks the conservation area and also has a long history. The area was recorded as common land in the 13th century and during the years of the plague was home to a number of wooden cabins. These were built for infected victims to live out their final days away from the rest of society. The quarry near here appears to have fallen out of use in the second half of the 19th century, perhaps when a series of reservoirs were established on the other side of the hill.

3.2 Archaeology

A Bronze Age flint arrowhead was discovered on Pex Hill and archaeologists have previously found struck flint pieces suggesting early farming and hunting activity. The material is difficult to date, but experts believe the finds to date from approximately 2000BC.

Mediaeval pottery has also been found in the fields to the north of Town End. There may well be potential for this site to yield further archaeological finds.

4 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Layout and Patterns of Development

For many years Cronton was a sparsely developed settlement with only a few loosely grouped buildings positioned along the edges of the lanes. Mid-19th century maps depict long roads carving their way through the rural landscape, meandering past substantial plots of farmland and greenery. There have since been some infill developments which detract from the loose arrangement to varying extents and additions and alterations to the buildings here. Most of the buildings are set within spacious soft landscaped gardens that face onto the lanes with former farm buildings generally positioned more tightly against roads. The historic loosely grouped character of the settlement therefore still prevails.

The buildings within the conservation area are of a similar scale with the exception of Cronton Hall which is by far the most substantial structure in this location. The recently built Rock Cottage replaced an earlier building of the same name, but is twice the size of its predecessor. The historic properties within Cronton were built to a size and specification relative to their original owner's wealth and status. In this locality they are likely to have been yeomen and other minor landowners.

The public highways within the Conservation Area are narrow country lanes with some sections only wide enough for single vehicle traffic; however there are a number of passing points to accommodate travel into and through the Conservation Area. The roads retain a countryside feel, especially Hall Lane as it heads north out of the village flanked by trees and hedgerows, with untamed grass verges and simple unobtrusive road markings. This road stretches out to Mill Lane through open agricultural fields devoid of buildings. Evidence of built-up conurbations can only be seen far on the horizon in the areas of Rainhill and Halsnead Park which helps to retain a sense of isolation the area would have originally had.



Figure 5 – Nodal space at the junction of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane, adjacent to the Cronton Cross.

A key nodal area can be found at the junction of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane, adjacent to the Cronton Cross. This is an open area of convergence for traffic from all directions, during non-peak hours traffic levels are relatively low, but traffic can become heavy during peak times. The sense of openness diminishes while moving along Hall Lane and the road narrows beneath the canopy of large trees. Out into Penny Lane the rural sense of place is emphasised by the grassy verges on either side of the road. As the road leads through the conservation area the perception of space returns with the large garden of Cronton Hall clear in view. There is a very different atmosphere alongside the Hall in Lyme Tree Court. The cobbled path complete with weeds, the abundance of trees and shrubbery, combined with the substantial sandstone properties in an enclosed setting gives this place a notably rural feel. The public footpath known Wrights Lane provides access north via a 'kissing gate' to open countryside leading towards Rainhill. This path can be followed out to Rainhill and provides an interesting and picturesque journey past open fields providing good views of Town End and beyond.

A number of original walls remain associated with some of Cronton's older properties along with a number of hedges bordering the lanes. The walls are all of simple appearance but differ in pattern of construction, height and appearance. Progressing down Hall Lane the walls front straight onto the road and are surmounted by greenery, giving an attractive appearance to the locality. The walls here help guide viewpoints around the conservation area, closing off views to the south creating a sense of enclosure and emphasising the compact nature of the conservation area.

A quaint stream known as Dog Clog Brook flows through the village which can be found near to Brook Close. This stream contributes positively to the area and accentuates the rural character of Cronton. It is positioned subtly within the conservation area and has a rustic appearance, with overgrown and unmanaged greenery overhanging the bank and retaining wall.



Figure 6 – An example of a remaining property boundary wall at Hall Lane, that is maintained to a good standard.

4.2 Open Spaces, Trees and Landscaping

Space is in abundance around Cronton as the village is surrounded by fields and green open meadows. The conservation area however is confined inside this green periphery with little open space to be found within, with the exception of the fairly spacious private gardens. A number of properties within the conservation area benefit from land of various proportions, often with large well-kept gardens to the rear and mature shrubbery. Where gardens to the front do exist they are often much smaller. Some gardens have been planted and laid out in a suburban style and do not equate with the more rural surroundings north of the conservation area, but ties in with the more urban 20th century residences to the south. The open views into gardens and their soft landscaped nature, coupled with the spaces between each of the properties play a major part in creating the village feel of the conservation area. Birdsong can be frequently heard around the neighbourhood and the sound of a flowing stream. The large number of trees and shrubbery provide habitats for a number of creatures.

In Hall Lane hawthorn hedges line sections of the road shielding views of modern dwellings with natural cover. This is in keeping with the wider natural setting of the conservation area and its rural heritage. Where hedges have been replaced with fencing the view is noticeably more suburban detracting from the pastoral atmosphere of the wider locale.

Wrights Lane features a distinctive tree-lined trail leading from Lyme Tree Court. It provides a pastoral route in and out of the conservation area and contributes positively to the character of the neighbourhood. The footpath known as Mill Lane has been likened to Anglo Saxon Hollow ways (land divisions that stopped animals straying). A large number of trees can also be found along Dog Clog Brook as it runs south near Hall Lane and Town End Cottages accentuating the rural nature of the area. The row of trees continues back south through the village terminating in Iver Close. There are also a number of mature trees in and adjacent to the garden of Cronton Hall which helps make the junction of Hall Lane and Lyme Tree Court particularly green.



Figure 7 – Tall wooden fencing creates an imposing inactive frontage that detracts from the wider natural setting of the conservation area at Hall Lane.

4.3 Focal Points, Focal Buildings and Views

An important focal point is the remains of an ancient cross which stands at the junction of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane. There are several theories as to the purpose of this structure. Some believe it to be a resting place for funeral processions on the way to Farnworth Church in Widnes, whilst others consider this to mark the place of a small market, (although there is no record of there ever being a market charter for Cronton.) Its location may be viewed as being somewhat inconvenient being positioned on what is now the pavement, but nevertheless it is a significant historical asset within Cronton. In 1906 the local historian Henry Taylor described the cross as a pedestal on three flights of steps with the cross head missing. Cronton Cross was cleaned and repaired in summer 2007 as part of the Restoration of Historic Crosses, Milestones and Landmarks Project. The Cross today is in a satisfactory condition, though the surrounding pavement is in a poor condition with a number of weeds appearing.

The most significant building in terms of prominence on the townscape to be found in the conservation area is Cronton Hall and its gates. This is the largest and most commanding building in the vicinity and has been a key landmark of the village for generations. The property dates from the early 18th century and is set back from the road behind imposing Grade II listed gate posts.

In his book, *South Lancashire*, the renowned architectural historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner described the Hall as having five bays, believing that the façade was treated in the early Victorian era but the house itself to be early 18th century in origin. This belief stemmed from his inspection of a staircase running through from basement to upper floor. It had twisted balusters, the twist starting only above an urn shape and the handrail turning up to the newel posts. Pevsner also noted the fine gate piers in front of the property with large vases and paired Tuscan columns. Cronton Hall was believed to have been rebuilt in the mid-18th century after a fire, resulting in the ground floor being much older than the rest of the house.



Figure 8 –The Cronton Cross poses as a important focal point of the Conservation Area, at the junction of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane.

It was noted in a Survey Report for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings by D. Worthington (1978) that the house contained an underground passage which purportedly emerged in Rainhill, some two kilometres away. Its existence may suggest that the Hall has its origins in the late 17th century. Cronton Hall is an essential element of the historic and architectural interest of the conservation area. Despite its name, the existing Hall has never been the home of the lord of the manor of Cronton. The lordship was separated from ownership of the Hall at some point when the manor was sold, re-sold and subdivided in the late sixteenth century.

The main roads in Cronton conservation area permit relatively short views along them and towards the adjacent properties and gardens. The public right of way through Lyme Tree Court, out into open countryside, provides good views of Cronton itself with the Hall and its associated outbuildings clear on the landscape. Penny Lane and Hall Lane provide fairly expansive views into and out of the conservation area across verdant fields helping to create a distinctly rural character in this area. Wrights Lane is more enclosed by higher hedges which channel attractive views along it into and out of the conservation area.

The higher ground of Pex Hill provides a fantastic vantage point to take in long views across the conservation area and the rest of the Borough with the towering buildings of Liverpool distinguishable on the horizon.

Figure 9 – Cronton Hall and its prominent grade II listed gate posts, arguably the most significant building in the conservation area.



4.4 Public Realm

Hall Lane is the principal route in and out of the conservation area. This road stretches in a southerly direction from Mill Lane approximately one mile away and has a country lane character, bringing traffic through open fields bordered by ditches and dotted with roadside trees. This section of the road is variable in width but overall very narrow with soft verges to either side of the road. On arriving at the junction of Penny Lane the road opens up to allow the inclusion of a narrow pavement located at alongside the former sandstone barn.

The broadest section of the roads in the conservation area is located at the convergence of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane where the road becomes increasingly suburban and regular with wider lanes and dwellings. As Hall Lane continues east, the road expands to accommodate several private parking bays. These are particularly noticeable and harm the setting of the conservation area. As Hall Lane travels through the centre of Town End and curves out towards the 20th century dwellings, the road is attractively lined with various mature trees and is bounded by pavements to both the North and South.

The southern pavement that runs from Cronton Cross along to Brook Close is of poor quality, with uneven footing, and cracked tarmac. The poor quality pavement deteriorates the overall setting of the conservation area, with sections of pavement looking unkempt.



Figure 10 – Large area of private parking bays off of the narrow Hall Lane.

5 ARCHITECTURE, DETAILS AND MATERIALS

5.1 Building Age and Uses

The buildings within the conservation area date from various eras with a number of mid-20th century properties neighbouring historic 18th and 19th sandstone structures, and some recent 21st century developments. Some buildings are believed to contain remnants of earlier development, possibly dating from the late mediaeval period onwards. The conservation area today features only domestic properties with former agricultural buildings either demolished or converted into dwellings.

The boundary excludes many modern developments of different character which sit alongside the conservation area, such as the properties found in Brook Close, Smithy Lane and Hall Lane heading east out of the village.

5.2 Architecture and Details

The historic buildings within the conservation area are largely built in the local vernacular style, which is to say they were built to meet local needs, using local construction materials, reflecting local traditions. The notable exception is Cronton Hall and its gates, built in Queen Anne style, which have been purposefully designed for an impressive aesthetic effect.



Figure 11 – Example of former agricultural building typical of the conservation area, in the local vernacular style using local stone.

The majority of older buildings within the conservation area have a simple two-storey form with gabled or hipped roofs with historic connections to agriculture. Former agricultural buildings are often plainer with simple and unsophisticated designs, giving them a humble and charming appearance in keeping with their rural setting. As such, the majority of the buildings that characterise the conservation area are rather plain yet robust in appearance and lack decoration and adornment.

A number of these buildings retain original features, such as external stone steps, ventilation features and large cart doors or doorways. Where such features have been previously lost the building often bears the scars of previous changes. These features, or remnants of the features, are highly beneficial because they enable people to 'read' the history of the original building. Such features are therefore significant to the individual buildings and contribute positively to the character of the conservation area.

A relative lack of windows in agricultural properties is usually historically significant to their form. Having so few openings is a fundamental aspect of their character. The size and proportions of the existing openings, as well as their number and arrangement, contribute towards the traditional characteristics of the property. The earliest windows in the conservation area would have originally displayed small panes of glazing, possibly leaded, set into stone mullions.

Early windows are likely to have been constructed of iron or timber. Sadly very few original windows remain; those surviving examples contribute significantly to the appearance of the conservation area. Most windows have been significantly altered both in their proportions and details which has harmed the character of buildings. Such changes should be avoided and informed reinstatement of original openings and window details is encouraged. The addition of uPVC windows, and inappropriately styled timber casements on some buildings, (such as stained timber domestic style windows within former agricultural outbuildings) has had a particularly harmful effect along with variously inappropriate detailing, construction, materials and finishes.

Chimney stacks and pots are important features of the skyline and roofscape of the Cronton conservation area and add to the individual interest of the buildings. Chimneys can provide clues to the wealth and status of the original owner with more affluent properties having more elaborate stacks. For example, Cronton Hall features large and decorative stacks which are a key architectural feature of the building, although these have been reduced in height from their original form. Several buildings within Cronton, including Sunnyside Farm, Stone Cross Farm and Town End Farm feature robust sandstone chimney stacks. These have been amended over time, but their substantial yet plain appearance reflects the simple architecture of the property and the lifestyle of early inhabitants.



Figure 12 – Typical early horizontal sliding sash windows with small panes, few original windows remain within the conservation area with many significantly altered.

Clay chimney pots are largely later but attractive, additions. Generally, former farm outbuildings do not incorporate chimneys and their simple rooflines should be maintained. Timber doors whilst altered are generally of a plain vertical boarded style which contributes significantly to the rural and agricultural character of the vernacular buildings in the conservation area. These types of doors should be retained.

Lightweight porches and canopies have been added to some buildings. Porches would not have featured in the area historically and these more recent additions detract from the character of the conservation area.

Originally roofs to the farmhouses and farm buildings were likely to have all been stone flags, however these would have been replaced from the 19th century onwards as Welsh slate became more widely available. Early slate and flag roofs would have been laid in diminishing courses, such as that which can be seen at Sunnyside Farm. Where slates have been replaced with concrete tiles, which results in a uniform appearance, this has had a detrimental effect on the appearance of the conservation area. The area is characterised by simple unadorned roofs.

Dormers or roof lights, or other roof additions that detract from the simplicity of the roofscape should be avoided. Eaves are largely simple with plain boards and simple but robust cast iron rainwater goods. Along the eaves of the property known as Lothlorein, brick has been laid in dogtooth fashion which is an interesting feature of this property and one not commonly seen in the conservation area.

Sandstone walls of similar designs are a consistent and prominent feature of the conservation area, forming the boundaries of a number of properties. These largely appear to have been constructed in an irregular, random rubble fashion though there are more formal examples and at least one important example of a stone slab wall. In some areas brick has replaced sandstone, laid in a simple stretcher bond, but this appears to be an historic alteration or repair. Well-worn coping stones complete the wall constructions and add to the uncomplicated, traditional look of the conservation area. Unfortunately, some walls are in a poor condition or have been inappropriately pointed, to the extent that details are being lost and their architectural interest is compromised to some extent.

In Hall Lane itself there are a number of large square stones lining the road at ground level. These may well be some of the oldest stones in the conservation area and appear to be in good condition. The incidence of intermediate pillars, fencing or railings on boundaries are fortunately limited, however the impact of these within the conservation area, or alongside it, detracts from the character of the area.

Several sites in the conservation area feature steel or timber field gates, such as the entrance to the Dutch barn residence and the fields of Wrights Lane. These enhance the rural character of the conservation area and contribute positively to the landscape. Some properties also feature attractive plain stone gate piers, particularly Town End Cottages. These simple features also enhance the rural and agricultural character of the conservation area.



Figure 13 – Site entrances to the Dutch Barn residence and the fields of Wright Lane, showing gates that contribute to the rural and agricultural character of the conservation area.

5.3 Building Materials and Details

Cranton was historically in close proximity to a quarry on Pex Hill with much of the local sandstone originating from there. The quarry played a significant part in defining the construction materials and architectural styles used in the locality. Many of the buildings in the conservation area are constructed of local sandstone with additional brick and timber incorporated into the neighbourhood buildings. The stone itself varies from dressed sandstone blocks laid in regular courses as at Stone Cross Farm, to roughly dressed stone in irregular courses in the barn at Stone Cross Farm, the 'poultiggery' at Sunnyside Farm and some boundary walls.



Figure 14 – Outbuildings at Sunnyside Farm, built using sandstone, likely to be from the former quarry on Pex Hill.

Regardless of whether a building is brick or stone (or both) lime/sand pointing would have been used. It is unfortunately the case that a number of buildings have been repointed in cement/sand pointing which is harmful from both a physical and aesthetic point of view. The large former barn in Lyme Tree Court is built almost entirely of red brick laid in English Garden Wall Bond. Its colour is in keeping with the smaller sandstone property nearby yet provides strong material contrast which adds to the visual interest of the conservation area.



Figure 15 – Large former barn at Lyme Tree Court built almost entirely of red brick, positively contributing to the conservation area.

Lothlorein and Lane End Barn are other examples of agricultural to residential conversions. The building is constructed of stone and brick and is thought to be 18th century though it may include part of an earlier 17th century structure. The former barn was developed in phases originating with the sandstone barn in the early 17th century before being extended into a larger sandstone barn in the 18th century and extended again sometime in the 19th century when brick was used. It is believed to have been used as a grain store and cattle shed for the local farm, before becoming derelict in the latter half of the 20th century. The building was converted and partially rebuilt in the late 1980s and divided into two properties, Lothlorein occupying the earlier partial sandstone build and Lane End Barn occupying the later 19th century brick section. Sunnyside Farm is also constructed of brick laid in common bond with somewhat a weathered patina, giving this building a darker appearance which contrasts well with its green surroundings. The adjacent outbuilding has evidence of historic repair and extension using brick, which is noticeably different to the original sandstone.

Town End Cottages are later additions to the locality despite the 1717 date stone. It is possible that this date stone was salvaged from an earlier property that existed on or near this site. The building was originally a barn until the early 1800s, built on the foundations of earlier 16th century cottages. The cottages are constructed using handmade brick of local clay, laid in a common bond. The mortar on the property at No.1 is noticeably different to its adjoining neighbour, being strap pointed with what appears to be a cement-based mortar. This creates a distinct difference in the building's appearance disrupting the original uniformity of the terrace.



Figure 16 –Town End Cottages, date from the 19th century of brick laid in common bond.



Figure 17 – Rock Cottage, an example of one of few rendered buildings in the conservation area.

Render is relatively rare in the conservation area with Cronton Hall and Rock Cottage being the principal exceptions. The rendering over of stone or brick should be discouraged unless there is evidence of there being render or lime wash historically.

Welsh slate is the predominant roofing material in the conservation area, used on virtually all buildings regardless of their age, historic use, or status. The use of slate remains an important unifying feature. Where alternatives such as concrete tiles have been adopted, these detract from the locally distinctive character of the conservation area.

Timber or cast iron would have been the predominant material for windows and doors on properties in the locality. The use of uPVC is not in keeping and detracts from the character and appearance of the conservation area. Where traditional timber doors and windows do survive in the conservation area (as at Cronton Hall and Sunnyside Farm) they undoubtedly enhance the traditional character and appearance of the building. Original materials and joinery details should be reinstated whenever possible.

5.4 Public Realm

In the early years of the 20th century it was noted that the roads of Town End were paved with cobbles. Tarmac has since been laid throughout most of the conservation area, but cobbles can still be seen in the area of Lyme Tree Court. There are a number of modern black street lamps within Cronton which are relatively recent additions. These rise to a considerable height which is somewhat obtrusive in the skyline. However, they are of a consistent and reserved design which does not detract significantly from the aesthetic appeal of the conservation area. The lamps are set apart at some distance, which lessens their visual impact.



Figure 18 – Surviving cobbled lanes at Lyme Tree Court, Town End Cronton.

5.5 Listed Buildings

There are four Grade II listed buildings within the conservation area. These heritage assets are nationally important and are of significant local interest.

Town End Farm, Hall Lane

One of earliest buildings remaining in the conservation area is Town End Farm. It is constructed of red sandstone and half-timbered at the rear. It features a date stone reading 'W.R.E 1705' but parts of this building are believed to date back to the 16th century and the existing building is likely to have been built onto an older foundation. The building evokes a sense of the wealth and prosperity of the original owner who we can assume achieved success as a yeoman. It also embodies the historic agricultural nature of Cronton and is one of a number of historic buildings associated with farming located in the vicinity. This property features an unusual sandstone mounting block near the front gate which was once used by owners of the property to mount their horses.

Sunnyside Farmhouse, Hall Lane

This property is suspected to date from the early 17th century and features two storeys constructed of brick with low proportions and with a gabled wing. It is similar to Town End Farm in plan, but has only one cross wing. This is another property which evokes a sense of rural simplicity that has existed in Cronton for many years and stands as a reminder of the historic agricultural nature of the area and the prevalence of farming in earlier times.

Gate Piers and Gates at Cronton Hall, Hall Lane

The Baroque styling of the stone gate piers and ironwork suggest an early to mid-18th century date. The ironwork is very similar in style to the gates at St Michael's Church, Huyton (the gates there are dated 1765). The gates and piers are clearly designed to impress

and communicate the wealth, status and taste of the occupier of the Hall. The gates line through with the front door to the Hall and are unusual in the sense that they are much more architecturally complex than the Hall appears today. The gate piers are indicative of the wealth and standing of the past occupiers of the Hall and demonstrate the historic importance of Cronton as a seat of minor gentry.

Cronton Cross, Hall Lane

The Cross at Town End is a substantial stone base of three square steps, surmounted by large square block carved out of a single stone, and a stump. It had a square stone that sat atop the stump; however this has since been lost. The Grade II listed Cross can be found at the junction of Hall Lane and Smithy Lane.

5.6 Locally Listed Buildings

At present Knowsley Council does not have a Local List. However, the Council is in the process of collating a list of locally important buildings which are 'significant' to the local area and the Borough.

Potential inclusions for the local list include:

- § Cronton Hall;
- § Lyme Tree Court;
- § The Dutch Barn;
- § Town End Cottages;
- § Small barn to Stonecross Farm (Inman's Barn);
- § Stone Cross Farm;
- § Lane End Barn;
- § Lothlorein.

Inclusion on a local list does not give statutory protection and therefore development would not always require planning permission, however where applications are required close scrutiny will be given to any development that may affect the significance and/or setting of a locally listed building.

6 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

6.1 Key Positive Features

Cronton conservation area can be evidenced as a post-medieval settlement (c1540 – 1750) and has largely survived the urban spread of neighbouring conurbations. The most notable features of the conservation area include the range of traditional historic dwellings and former farm buildings laid out in a loose but complementary arrangement and the area's many trees and shrubs. The extensive use of local sandstone for its buildings and walls is another key element of the conservation area. The more significant buildings and features include:

- § Cronton Hall and Gates;
- § Town End Farm;
- § Stonecross;
- § Small barn to Stonecross Farm (Inman's Barn);
- § The Dutch Barn;
- § Town End Cottages;
- § Lyme Tree Court;
- § Coach House opposite Lyme Tree Court
- § Sunnyside Farm;
- § Lothlorein;
- § Land End Barn;
- § The Stone Cross;
- § The mounting block to the front of Town End Farm;
- § Trees and landscaping;
- § Cobbles of Lyme Tree Court;
- § Traditional stone and brick boundary walls;
- § Agricultural Setting.

7 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

7.1 Conservation Area Boundary Review

The conservation area boundary as it currently stands would benefit from review in accordance with Historic England Advice Note 1 (2011) 'Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management'. The existing boundary designated in 1978, is now outdated, following a number of changes resultant from building conversions, alterations or garden extensions.

Suggested Boundary Amendments

Proposed Additions

Farmyard Adjacent Town End Farm

The extension of the boundary to encompass land adjacent to Town End Farm, currently occupied by silos, would recognise the importance of this site in establishing the agricultural character of Town End, Cronton on the key entry point to the conservation area from Hall Lane. There is a historic stone wall that runs along the eastern bank of Hall Lane on the route in and out of the conservation area, which the extension of the boundary would encompass.

Footpath north of Lyme Tree Court

In Lyme Tree Court the conservation area boundary extends partly out into the public pathway leading north, but this boundary is ill-defined by features on the ground. The extension of the conservation area is suggested to include the path as far as the 'kissing gate', this would encompass more of the picturesque hedgerow-lined path leading up to it and form a logical defined boundary. The conservation boundary should encompass the hedgerow along either side of the public footpath that contributes to the setting of the conservation area. This would also provide further protection to the wider setting of the converted Dutch Barn located in this vicinity.

This approach would comply with paragraph 17 of Historic England Advice Note 1 (2011) which states that '*it is worth considering the immediate setting also requires the additional controls from designation*' and paragraph 66 which states that conservation area boundaries '*will generally be defined by physical features*'.

Lothlorein and Lane End Barn

The current boundary extends only to include parts of the gardens of Lane End Barn and the adjacent property known as Lothlorein and does not include the full boundary of these properties, due in part to the buildings being converted after the original designation. It is recommended that the conservation area boundary be extended to the property boundaries. This would be a coherent and logical approach consistent with current national guidance.

Stonecross Farm

The current boundary does not follow the current extent of the garden, this having been extended to the rear since the original boundary was drawn up. It is recommended that these property boundary extensions be reflected in the amended conservation area boundary.

Dutch Barn

Since the original designation of the conservation area the Dutch Barn has been converted to a domestic residence and a garden created around it. It is recommended that this change be acknowledged through extending the conservation area to include the garden located at the rear of the property. This extension would be a coherent and logical approach to contain the full property boundaries, and provide further protection to the setting of the converted hay barn.

This approach would comply with Historic England Advice Note 1 (paragraph 66), which states that *'a unified approach is desirable to their management as well as suggesting that in almost all situations the conservation area boundary runs around rather than through a space or plot'*.

Proposed Omissions

1 Brook Close

The current boundary includes a small triangular section of the garden to 1 Brook Close, which does not appear to add any features of value to the conservation area, and neither follows the line of any physical features. The boundary should be amended to remove this section, with the amended boundary defined by the property boundaries to 1 Brook Close, with the stream, Dog Clog Brook and surrounding trees to be included in the conservation area.

88 Hall Lane

Sine the original designation 88 Hall Lane has been extended, and it appears that the original boundary may have been inaccurately drawn as the boundary cuts through the middle of the plot. 88 Hall Lane and its garden do not add to the qualities of the

conservation area and it is recommended that this land be wholly removed from the conservation area to reflect the current property boundary,

12 Cronton Park Close

Behind Town End Cottages, No. 12 Cronton Park Close is currently included within the conservation area boundary. The property was built after the conservation area was designated on the former curtilage land of Town End Cottages. This property does not contribute towards the special character or appearance of the locality and it is therefore recommended that the land be removed from the conservation area boundary.

This approach would comply with paragraph 66 of Historic England Advice Note 1 which states that *'the special interest of areas designated many years ago may now be so eroded by piecemeal change or by single examples of poorly designed development that parts of the area may no longer have special interest. In such cases, boundary revisions will be needed to exclude them'*.

7.2 Design of Development

Previous changes to historic buildings are not all sympathetic to the character of the area. For example, new or enlarged window openings within historic farm buildings detract from their vernacular character. Extensions and other changes to buildings should take into account the historic design of the host building, seeking to enhance this where possible.

The design and position of some development adjacent the conservation area, such as 90-100 Hall Lane, fails to harmonise with the historic pattern of development and the architectural qualities of buildings. Any new development should seek to take cues from the historic character and appearance of the conservation area, taking into account the content of this appraisal.

7.3 Traffic and Pedestrian Movement

Town End, Cronton is a relatively quiet area with low traffic flows during non-peak times and is often used by agricultural vehicles, however traffic problems are heightened at rush hour with the narrow country lanes used to avoid delays that can occur using adjacent roads. There is a visible damage caused to buildings within the conservation caused by inadequate dispersal of surface water, salt and grit, resultant from increased traffic flows. The pedestrian footpaths are somewhat narrow in parts, particularly in the area of Penny Lane which can make pedestrian movement difficult. This does however make an important contribution to the rural character of the conservation area. The footpaths between Cronton Cross and Brook Close are of a poor condition and opportunities to improve the surfaces should be taken by the Council.

Generally, highways signs and lines are minimal and very low key. This should be maintained and further simplifications undertaken where permissible. The formal private car parking spaces on Hall Lane detract from the conservation area, however they are private and not part of the public highway, therefore opportunities to re-establish the original proportions of the public highway are limited.

7.4 Rural Setting of the Conservation Area

The public footpath of Wrights Lane, which leads onto Mill Lane, has fortunately retained its character as a low-key trail leading out to fields towards Rainhill. This path is popular and serves as an example of what many of Cronton's thoroughfares would have previously looked like. The character of this path and the general rural and agricultural surroundings of the conservation area should be protected from urban and suburban forms of development in order to protect the rural setting of the conservation area. The modern farmyard with the agricultural silo buildings at the entrance to the conservation area along Hall lane, while not of intrinsic historic value, do help to establish the agricultural character and setting of the conservation area.

7.5 Vacant or Derelict Sites

There are currently no significant derelict sites or vacant buildings within Cronton conservation area. It is therefore unlikely that loss would occur as a result of vacancy or dereliction.

7.6 Enforcement Issues

Some properties have had some inappropriate alterations, such as the installation of architecturally incongruous doors and windows. It would be beneficial to undertake a survey to check that existing features benefit from the appropriate permissions, and provide a baseline from which future changes to the conservation area can be monitored.

7.7 Article 4 Directions

The conservation area does not currently have an Article 4 Direction in place. The creation of an Article 4 Direction would enable the local planning authority to control a greater range of minor alterations to residential properties which could otherwise be carried out by a property owner without planning permission under their permitted development rights.

Alterations such as the installation of replacement doors and windows, re-roofing in modern materials, the removal of chimneys, creation of dormer windows, the addition of porches etc., can all be controlled by Article 4 Directions. The conservation area is not currently under an Article 4 direction but this may be a step to be considered in the near future due to the noticeable impact that these minor changes are having within the area.

7.8 Opportunities for Enhancement

There are a number of opportunities to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. Further details will be set out in the Conservation Area Management Plan for the Town End, Cronton conservation area.

The key areas for enhancement are:

- § Reinstating traditional architectural details to buildings, particularly vernacular and agricultural styles of openings within farm buildings and former farm buildings;
- § Some buildings and structures would benefit from suitable maintenance and repairs, e.g. some sandstone structures in the conservation area would benefit from localised repair and maintenance using appropriate lime mortar and matching stone;
- § The provision of additional heritage interpretation materials detailing the significance of the area and its history;
- § Some of the public footpaths in the area would benefit from repair and maintenance, where cracked and in poor condition;
- § Opportunities to restrict and limit traffic that enters the conservation area;
- § Provision of specific design guidance for additions and alterations;
- § A number of buildings identified in this Character Appraisal would benefit from being 'locally listed' and included on a local list so that their interest is given appropriate consideration.

8 REFERENCES

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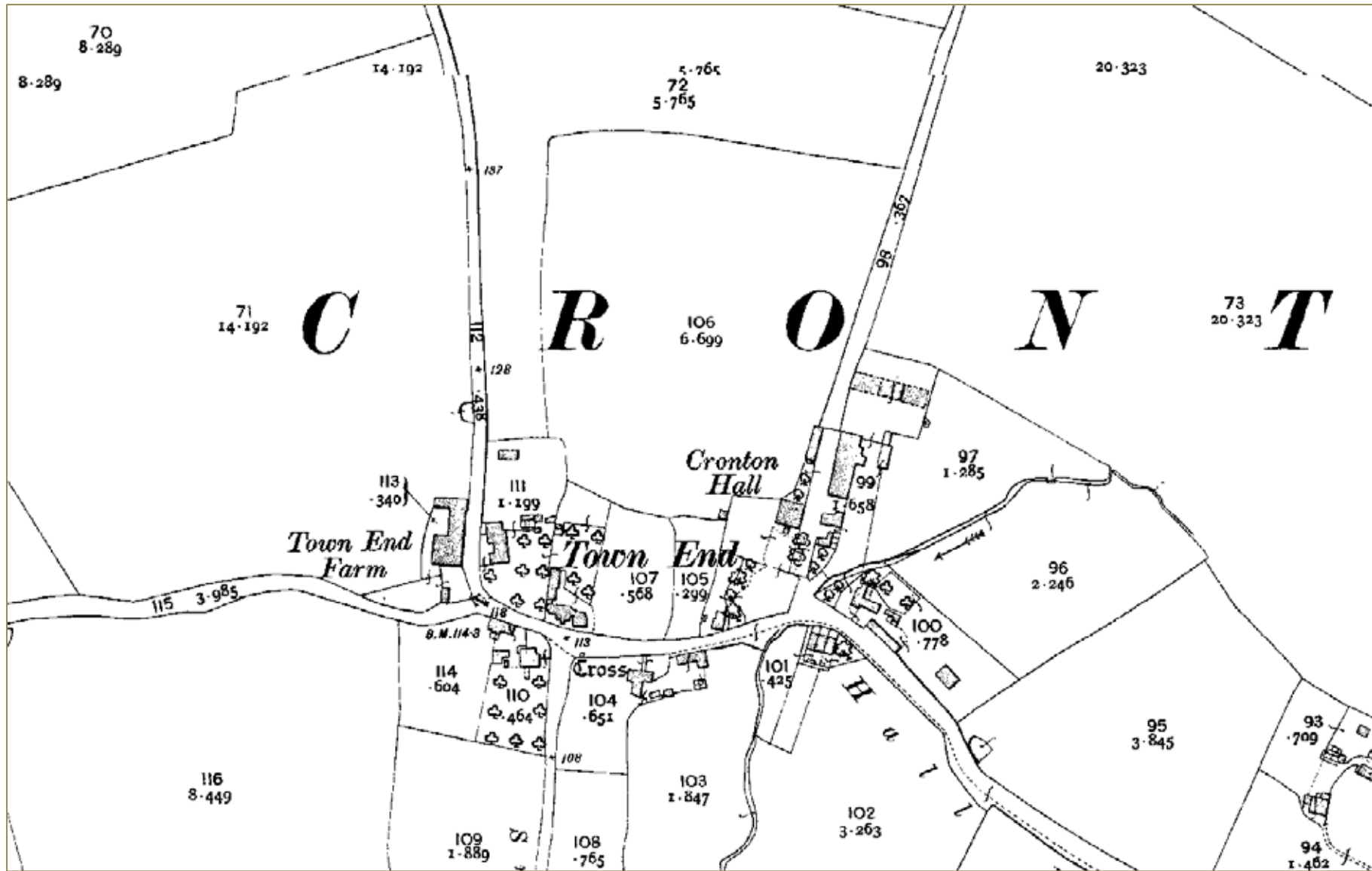
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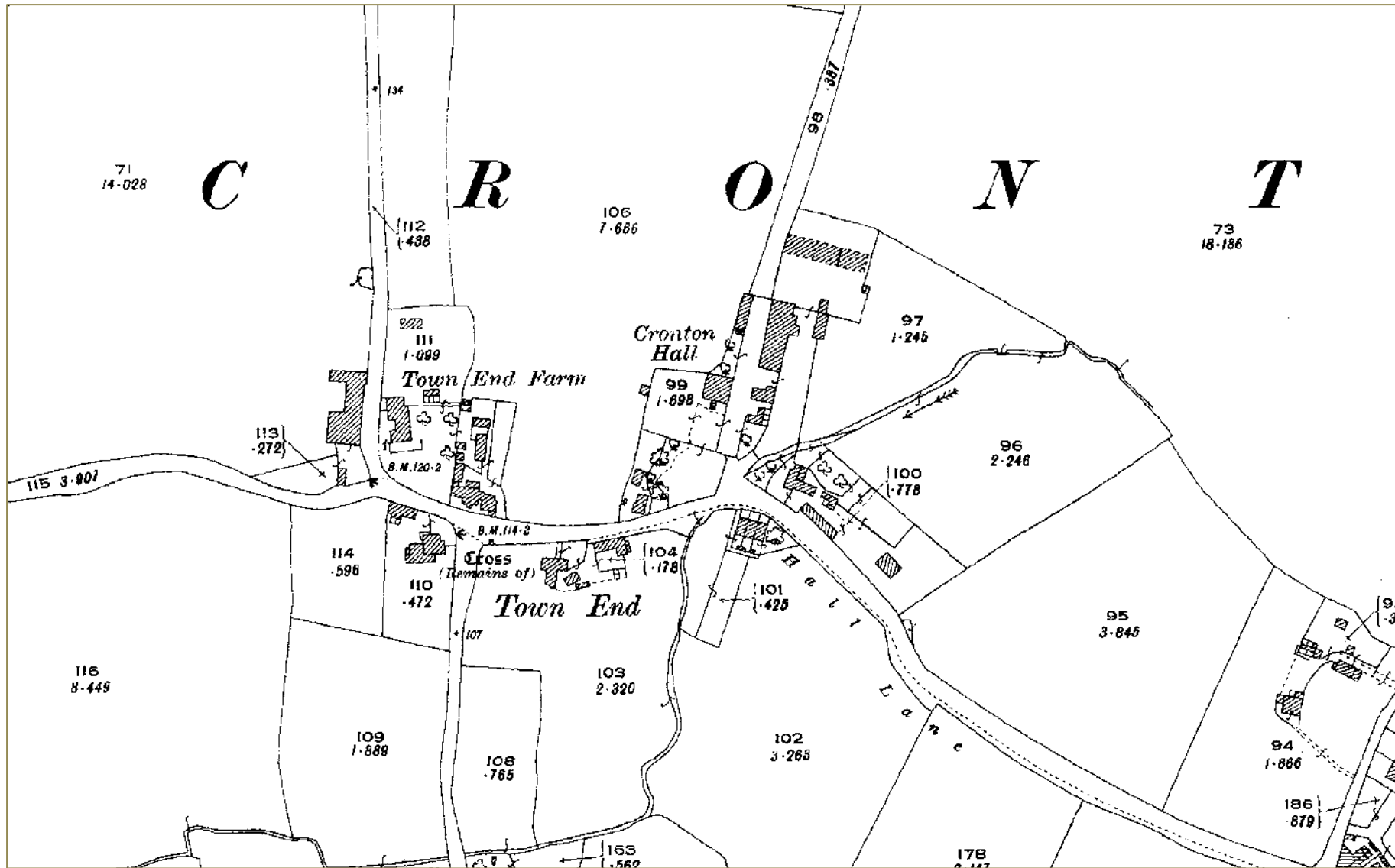
APPENDIX 1 - Historic Map 1840



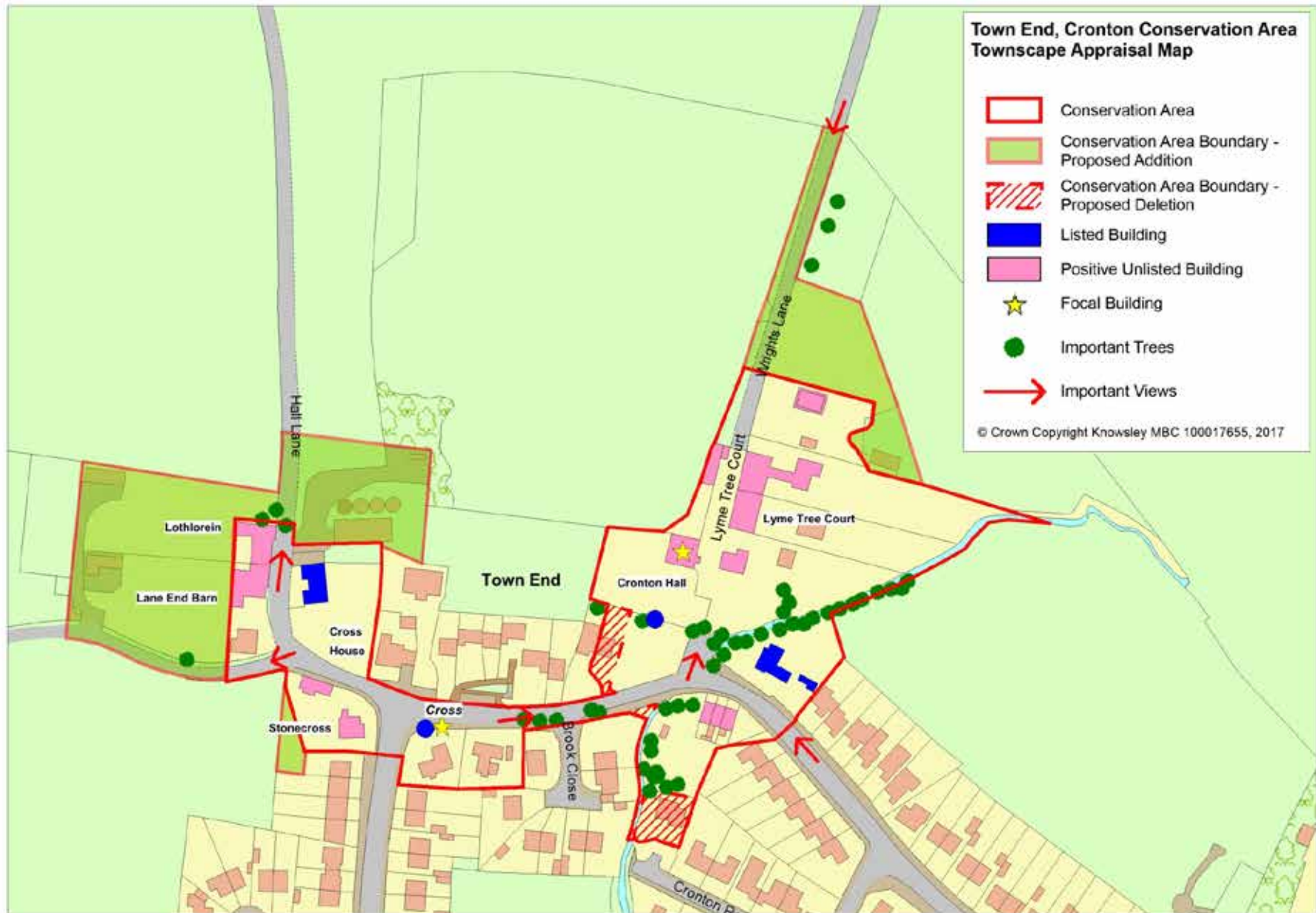
APPENDIX 2 – Historic Map 1907



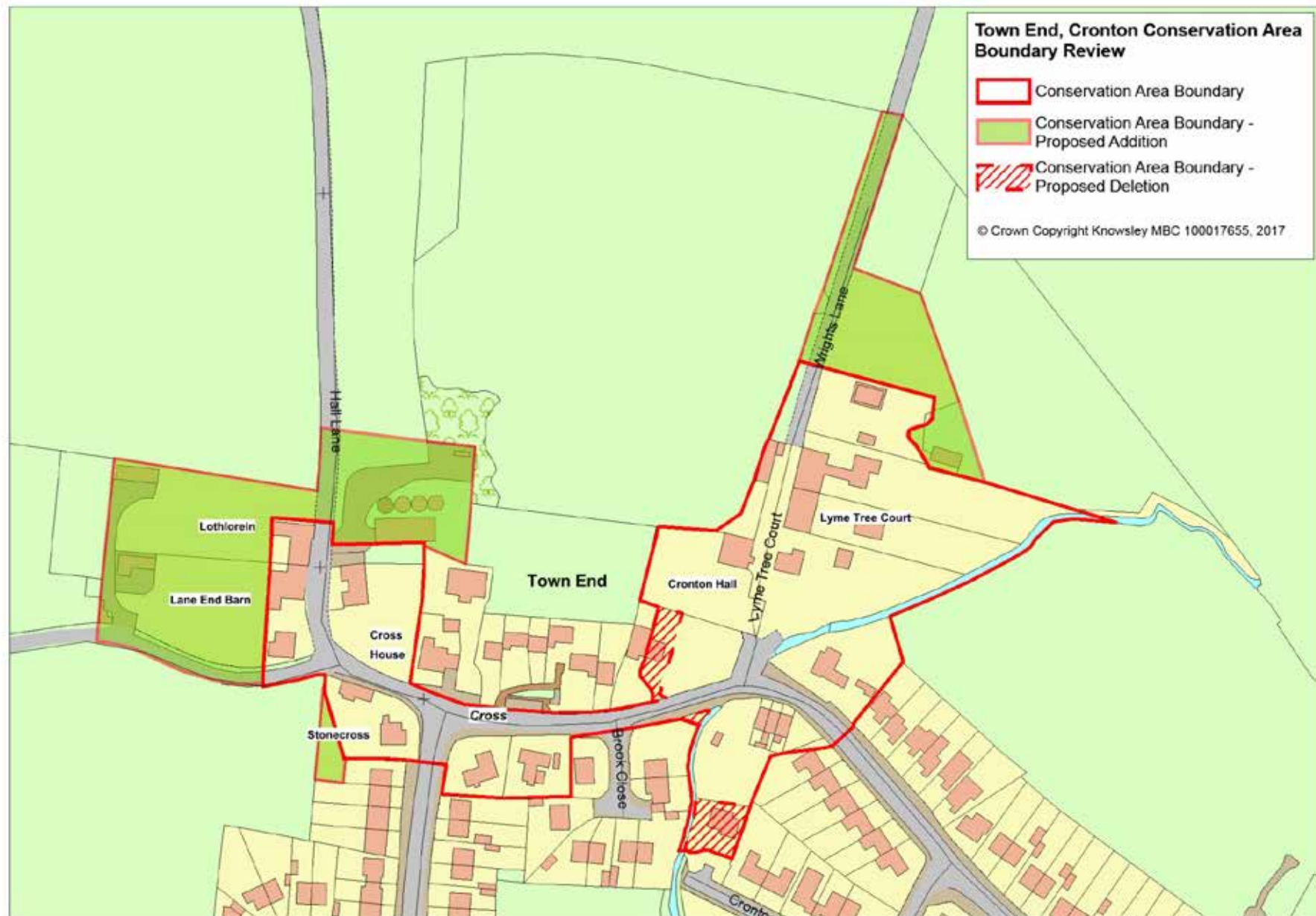
APPENDIX 3 – Historic Map 1927



APPENDIX 4 – Townscape Appraisal Map



APPENDIX 5 – Boundary Review Map



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