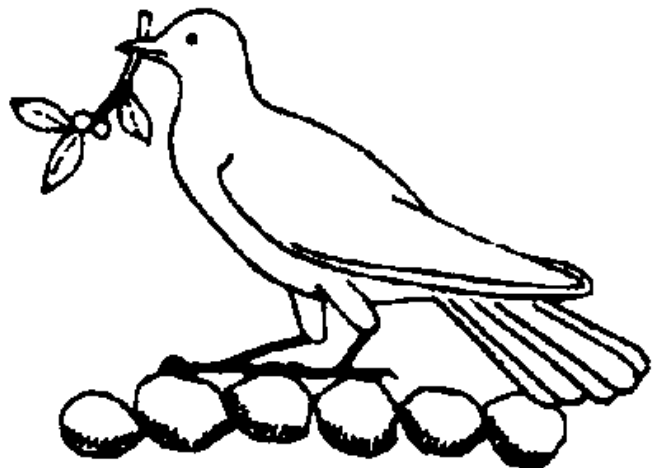


# **DRAFT CROFT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**



**Prepared for Croft Parish Council**

**By Trigpoint Conservation & Planning Ltd**

**August 2016**

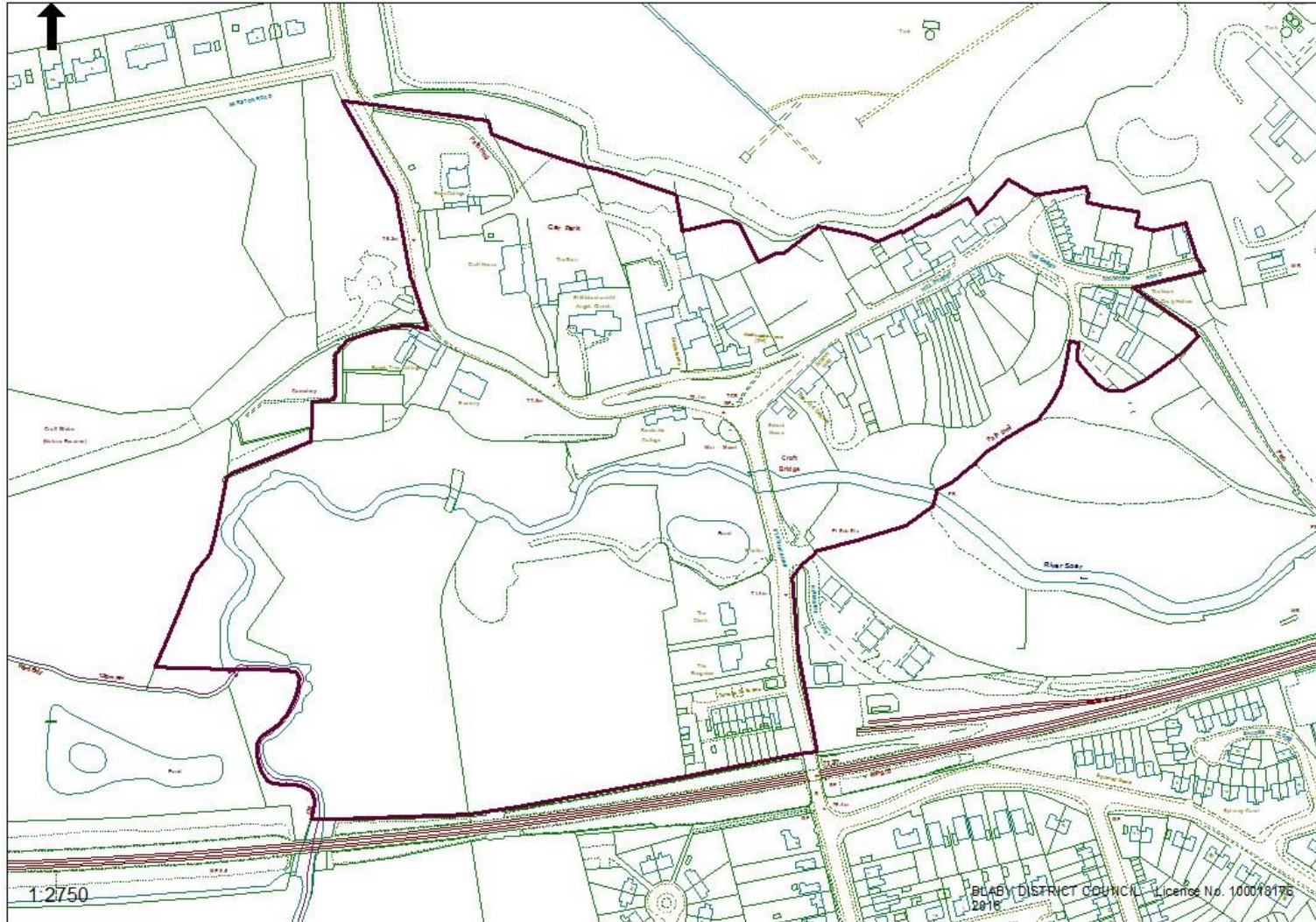
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Croft Conservation Area was proposed for designation in 2016 and the boundaries of the Conservation Area encompass the village's historic core that lies principally on the north side of the River Soar, covering an area of about 36 acres (about 14.5 hectares) (see Map 1).
- 1.2 The Blaby District Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008) recognises that the historic village centre is perceived to be located on the intersection of Station Road, Huncote Road and Hill Street and within this area is a core of historic buildings dating from the Medieval period through to the Victorian and Edwardian expansion of the village in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 1.3 The purpose of this character appraisal is to define the boundaries of the Conservation Area and to examine its historical development and describe its present appearance, identifying those qualities that contribute to its significance as a place of special architectural and historic interest as required by paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The adopted appraisal will then be used to inform the consideration of management and development proposals within the Area.
- 1.4 The scope and arrangement of this document is based on the guidance contained in Historic England's Advice Note No. 1 *Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management*, published in February 2016.

**MAP 1: CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY MAP**



## 2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 Conservation areas are defined by section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, and Councils are required by Section 72 to pay special attention '*to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area*' when making decisions on development proposals within a conservation area.
- 2.2 Conservation areas are now classified as designated heritage assets and paragraph 17 of the NPPF makes it clear that the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core land-use planning principle that should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking, and paragraph 131 expects local planning authorities to take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of the heritage asset when determining planning applications.
- 2.3 These national planning policy objectives are supported by the Council's adopted Core Strategy (CS), and Policy CS20 (*Historic Environment and Culture*) seeks to ensure that new development preserves, protects and where possible enhances conservation areas and their setting.
- 2.4 However the designation of the Croft Conservation Area is not intended to prevent new development in the Conservation Area, and paragraph 137 of the NPPF encourages local planning authorities to look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas. This appraisal is therefore intended to inform the consideration of development proposals within the Conservation Area to ensure that future changes can be accommodated in an informed and sympathetic way, without adversely affecting the Area's special qualities, having regard to the objectives of the national and local planning policies.

### **3.0 LOCATION AND CONTEXT**

- 3.1 Croft village is located approximately 6 miles to the south west of Leicester and it is a village of two distinct parts, with the historic core of the village, reflecting its development up to the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century located to the north of the railway line and with a later, mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century village centre to the south. The village is also distinctive in having Croft Quarry directly against its northern and eastern boundary. The boundary of the Conservation Area has therefore been drawn around the historic core of the village, which lies primarily along Station Road, Huncote Road and Hill Street.
- 3.2 The overall linear form and layout of the historic core of the village has largely been dictated by the local topography, with the early settlement squeezed between the River Soar, which flows to the south of the village, and the rocky outcrop that was Croft Hill to the north and is now a substantial quarry. The Blaby District Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment remarks that the core of the settlement is characterised by its sharp rise in topography towards the quarry and Croft Hill. In this context the historic settlement occupies a relatively flat terrace of land that follows a distinctive linear, east-west alignment roughly parallel to the River Soar, with land levels within the Conservation Area rising gently from about 72 metres AOD on Hill Street, at the eastern end of the village, to about 81 metres AOD in the vicinity of the church of Saint Michael and All Angels, which occupies a raised knoll on the western side of the village.
- 3.3 As a result of its historical development the village has two distinctive character areas, with the more densely developed Hill Street and Dovecote Road on the eastern side of the village, with houses on both sides of the road, in contrast to the sparser and more intermittent development along Huncote Road on the western side of the village, where development is mainly located on the north side of the street. Within these main character areas are a number of smaller areas of considerable historic and architectural interest that include Saint Michael and All Angels church and churchyard, the range of former agricultural buildings on the south side of Dovecote Road and the groups of terraced cottages built for the local workers.
- 3.4 The Conservation Area also includes areas of open space, including the important ecological and historic landscape of Croft Pasture, a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), that lies next to the historic settlement and which helps to

define the essential character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- 3.5 The chronological, social and economic development of the village has left a range of buildings of various architectural styles and types, that includes several Grade II listed buildings including the Church of Saint Michael and All Angels, no. 5 Hill Street and its adjoining butcher's shop, and the war memorial and enclosure, as well as other important historic buildings that can be considered to be non-designated heritage assets as defined by the NPPF (see Appendix 1). Together these designated and non-designated heritage assets make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its overall significance.

## **4. GENERAL CHARACTER AND PLAN FORM**

- 4.1 The historic character and overall form of the Conservation Area is largely the result of its physical and economic development, from the influence of the River Soar and Croft Hill and its transformation from a small rural settlement to a more industrialised village during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Conservation Area is also to some degree isolated from the main body of Croft by the River Soar and the railway line and this separation has contributed greatly to the historic integrity of the Croft Conservation Area.
- 4.2 The predominantly linear, east-west alignment of the historic village core and the layout of buildings along Huncote Road and Hill Street/Dovecote Road has largely been dictated by the local topography, with the early settlement squeezed between the River Soar and the rocky outcrop that was Croft Hill to the north.
- 4.3 The social and economic development of the historic settlement, and its evolution from an agricultural settlement to an industrial settlement, is evident within the Conservation Area. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croft was a relatively small rural settlement, the focal point of which was the Medieval church, with an agricultural based economy and there are a number of surviving agricultural buildings within the Conservation Area. However as the village expanded rapidly during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the quarry many new buildings were added to the village, including rows of workers' cottages and associated village infrastructure such as the school house and Union Chapel. This combination of the historic street pattern and the visible chronological development in the surviving built fabric now plays an important role in defining the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 4.4 In addition the River Soar has clearly been an impediment to development to the south and as a result the historic core is surrounded to the south and west by a relatively open landscape that now provides for a wide diversity of spatial and visual qualities that contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

## 5. LANDSCAPE SETTING

- 5.1 The setting of the village in the landscape and the influence of the local topography is clearly discernible, with the early settlement being built on a river terrace above the flood plain of the River Soar, presently defined as a flood risk zone, with Croft Hill to the north.
- 5.2 The Conservation Area's distinctive landscape setting and local topography can immediately be appreciated upon entering the historic village from Station Road, the Blaby District Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment notes that the core of the settlement is characterised by its sharp rise in topography towards the quarry and Croft Hill. As a result of this topography the Heathcote Arms is a particularly prominent building on the approach over the River Soar from Station Road. This approach also offers glimpsed views of Saint Michael's church tower, and although the church occupies a knoll of higher ground towards the western end of the Conservation Area it is not a particularly prominent building, but these glimpsed views of the church tower provide an important visual connection between it and the surrounding landscape that contributes to its overall setting and significance.
- 5.3 As a result of the flood zone alongside the River Soar much of the land to the south and south-west of the Conservation Area remains as open fields and paddocks and the extent of this open land can be appreciated from the River Soar bridge. This open land includes the Croft Pasture SSSI Nature Reserve, which provides an attractive open setting for the Conservation Area on its western margins and also some important views of the church tower.
- 5.4 The open flood plain also extends to the south of Hill Street/Dovecote Road, but as a result of the almost continuous frontage development along these streets there are only limited views over the River Soar valley, and as such this area makes little contribution to the overall appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 5.4 Croft Quarry to the north of the Conservation Area is largely screened from view by buildings and woodland off Hill Street and Huncote Road and as such it makes little contribution to the setting or appearance of the Conservation Area. However the associated buildings and open storage areas to the east, which are clearly visible from Dovecote Road, have a considerable physical and visual presence that detracts from the overall setting and appearance of the Conservation Area.

## 6. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

- 6.1 The village of Croft has a varied and interesting history, much of it detailed by the Aggregate Industries web site and R W D Fenn '*Quarrying at Croft*' (undated) (<http://www.aggregate.com/about-us/history/croft/>) and by the Croft Heritage Group (see <http://www.leicestershirevillages.com/croft/villagehistory.html>).
- 6.2 The earliest historic activity of direct relevance to the Conservation Area, dates from the Roman period with various finds of Roman origin on Croft Hill (*Leicestershire and Rutland Historic Environment Record (HER), ref. MLE7683*) and also the quarrying of stone from The Clevis, a rocky outcrop on the south side of the River Soar, for use in the construction of the Fosse Way and in the Roman settlement at Leicester. This area is still shown as a quarry on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map.
- 6.3 Following the Roman period, Croft became an important Anglo-Saxon meeting place, largely due to its central location and distinct topography, of the prominence of Croft Hill in the otherwise flat River Soar flood-plain. It is therefore likely that settlement at Croft occurred from as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> Century (*HER ref. MLE9335*) and a synod attended by King Wiglaf of Mercia, the Mercian Court and a number of southern bishops in Croft in AD836 indicated the site's importance.
- 6.4 At this time the settlement was referred to as '*Craeft*', derived from the Old English for 'craft, machine, or engine', and whilst this may refer to a wind-mill or a water-mill there is also a suggestion that it could also refer to the craft of quarrying. By the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086 the settlement is recorded as '*Crebre*'.
- 6.5 There are few records relating to Croft during the late Medieval period, and it is likely that the village remained a modest settlement. The earliest surviving structure within the village is the late-14<sup>th</sup> century west tower of St Michael and All Angels, which dates to the end of this period (*HER ref. MLE11910*). Although the survival of a Norman font and window in the church is evidence of an earlier church built of local quarried stone, and there is also a suggestion that this building had a Saxon timber-built predecessor.
- 6.6 The remainder of the church was rebuilt in 1879, at about the same time as The Old Rectory was constructed on the south side of Huncote Road to replace an earlier rectory that was demolished at the time. The Revd. James Brookes, whose family

were local landowners, was appointed as the new rector in 1872 of Croft and he set about building the present rectory and he also extensively restored and extended the church in Croft stone, the original buildings being shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map prior to their rebuilding.

- 6.7 The historic core of Croft is centred around Hill Street and parish records indicate that there were 13 families living in the village in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. There are no surviving maps and little descriptive evidence relating to Croft during this period, although John Prior's 1777 map of Leicestershire shows the village of Croft as a collection of small buildings aligned along what is now Hill Street, along with the church at the eastern end of the village and a windmill on top of Croft Hill. A straight track or road leads from the village to the Fosse Way, and no buildings can be seen south of the river.
- 6.8 Whilst individual buildings cannot be identified from Prior's map, it shows that some of the oldest surviving buildings within the Conservation Area are situated along Hill Street and Dovecote Road. The design and appearance of no. 1 Hill Street suggests an early Medieval timber frame building and Chestnut House, situated at 5 Hill Street (MLE11906), is a Grade II listed building thought to have been constructed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Prior's map also shows buildings to the south of Dovecote Road in a similar location to the present range of farm buildings off The Green. All of which are shown in more detail on the later 1863 Ordnance Survey map.
- 6.9 It is likely that the village remained a compact rural settlement throughout this period, with change only following the parish enclosure in 1779, which would have had a profound effect on both the local landscape and the economic and social structure of the village. To replace work lost in agriculture new sources of employment were introduced into the village. White's History and Gazetteer of Leicestershire of 1846 and 1864 mentions that a considerable number of the village's inhabitants were employed as framework knitters, most likely as out-workers by larger factories based in Leicester, working either within their main home or in purpose-built workshops, but there is no surviving evidence of any knitters' workshops within the Conservation Area.
- 6.10 The scale of change in the village in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be more fully appreciated when looking at census data. In 1801 Croft had a population of 255 living in 48 households, and by 1871 this had risen to just 299 living in 71 households. By 1881,

however, the population of Croft had almost doubled to 576. This sudden growth in population, and the subsequent development of the village, reflects its transformation into an industrial village with the development of the quarry.

- 6.11 In 1865 Samuel Davenport Pochin acquired the Croft Brickworks and in partnership with his brother Henry, established The Croft Stone and Brick Company in 1872. As the numbers of quarry and stone workers increased in Croft, those involved in agricultural and other local trades, such as framework knitting, declined. By 1881 there were 60 stone quarriers, 35 kerb dressers, and a granite cutter listed as living in Croft compared to just 7 hosiery seamers and one framework knitter which portrays a different picture of the village from that in White's Directory of 1864.
- 6.12 In order to accommodate these incoming workers, new housing and wider infrastructure was developed. The bulk of these workers were housed in the terraced cottages along Hill Street and Dovecote Road, and Orchard Street, which ran north-eastwards from The Green and are now demolished although the alignment of the road can still be seen to the left of no. 2, The Green, and are shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map.
- 6.13 In addition a new chapel and a school were also built in the village. Samuel Pochin was a dedicated non-conformist and a member of the Friar Lane Baptist Chapel in Leicester, and he built the Union Chapel off Dovecote Road for the village. This was completed in 1882 and is first shown on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map. The foundation stone laying ceremony took place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1881 and it was an occasion of some civic splendour attended by local dignitaries. The earlier 1863 Ordnance Survey map also shows the village school at the western end of Hill Street that was provided by the National Society for the Education of the Poor and erected in 1854 at a cost of £200, and later extended in 1875. A house for the school mistress was built in 1861. A three arched bridge was also built over the Soar in 1859 at a cost of £700 from the county rates.
- 6.14 Throughout the growth of the village during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the layout of the village remained relatively compact with the majority of Croft's population residing along Hill Street and its eastern extremities of Orchard Street and Dovecote Road. The 1863 Ordnance Survey map does not show any buildings to the south of the River Soar, and development on this side of the river did not take place until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the Leicester to Nuneaton railway. The railway line had opened in

1864, with a station at Croft. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new development had taken place between the railway line and the river with the development of the terraced cottages on the west side of Station Road, and a new engineering works (the Excelsior Works) on the east side of Station Road - this site is now occupied by a modern office complex and is outside of the Conservation Area.

- 6.15 These phases of development are still clearly evident within the Conservation Area, and although Croft village has grown considerably during the 20<sup>th</sup> century this new development has taken place to the south of the railway line, leaving the historic core and key parts of its rural setting reasonably intact and these elements along with the basic historic street pattern now form the basis of the Conservation Area.

## 7. ARCHAEOLOGY

7.1 There has been very little previous archaeological investigation carried out within Croft. However the Leicestershire & Rutland Historic Environment Record indicates that the Croft Conservation Area, which covers the historic core of the settlement (*HER ref. MLE9335*), as is evident in the pattern of streets, housing plots and the age of many of the properties, does have important archaeological interest with prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and post-Medieval remains being recorded within the general vicinity of the Area.

### *Upper Palaeolithic to Middle Bronze Age (40000 BC - 1000 BC)*

7.2 Excavations within the area of Croft Quarry in 1992 and 1994 recorded several palaeochannels, remnants of inactive river or stream channels which have been either filled or buried by younger sediment. Finds included a Palaeolithic struck flint, probable auroch bones, waterlogged wood and charcoal (*HER ref. MLE20945*). Also recorded to the east of Croft Quarry and north of The Green was evidence of a possible Mesolithic/Neolithic settlement with round houses (*HER ref. MLE63*).

### *Roman (AD 43 – 410)*

7.3 Evidence of Roman activity has been recorded on Croft Hill, to the north of the Conservation Area, and finds included sherds of late Roman pottery and late Roman coins (*HER ref. MLE7683*). Within Croft Quarry, a top stone of a 'Hunsbury' or 'beehive' quern was found in quarry spoil (*HER ref. MLE6571*).

### *Late Anglo Saxon (850 AD to 1066 AD)*

7.4 A bronze stirrup mount was found by a metal detectorist in the mid-1980s to the west of the Conservation Area (*HER ref. MLE6085*).

### *Late Post-Medieval (1700 AD to 1899 AD)*

7.5 A 2009 archaeological watching brief on a site adjacent to no. 2, Hill Street within the Conservation Area recorded a very deep deposit that contained many ages of material. These included a sherd of Samian pottery and sherds of Medieval and post-Medieval pottery. It is thought that the deposit may be a quarry pit backfilled in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (*HER ref. MLE17737*).

7.6 These various archaeological remains and finds indicate that there is good potential for below ground archaeology within the Conservation Area and consequently

development proposals within the Conservation Area requiring excavation works should be preceded by a considered archaeological investigation and assessment.

## **8. CHARACTER AND INTERRELATIONSHIP OF SPACES WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA**

- 8.1 Given the nature of development within the Conservation Area, there is very little public open space. The principal area of public space is perhaps the embankment to the front of the Heathcote Arms. This area provides an attractive backdrop to the War Memorial and a public gathering place for the annual memorial parades, and it is also an attractive open space in the foreground of views towards the church.
- 8.2 The Green also offers an attractive open space at the head of Hill Street, although it is of less historic interest. The historic Ordnance Survey maps show that the road passed directly in front of the terraced cottages with an area of open space on the opposite (south) side of The Green, and this present grassed area was only being laid out in present form in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 8.3 The principal area of open space within the Conservation Area that is publically accessible is Croft Pasture, a SSSI that is owned by the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. This open pasture land, accessed by the public footpath network off Station Road and Huncote Road, is an unusual Leicestershire example of an acidic mixed grassland. This site also includes the rocky outcrop on the south side of the River Soar known as The Clevis and therefore also has considerable archaeological interest.
- 8.4 A further area of public open space lies on the east side of Station Road alongside the River Soar that provides an attractive seating and landscaped area. This area was also the location of the former sheepwash, as shown on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map, and as such provides a connection to the agricultural activities of the village.

## **9. KEY VIEWS AND VISTAS**

- 9.1 Whilst St Michael and All Angels Church is centrally placed within the Conservation Area it is not a particularly prominent building as it is largely screened by the surrounding buildings and the trees within the churchyard. Consequently the church has quite a restrained presence in the Conservation Area, with views of the church generally restricted to views from Huncote Road to the south.
- 9.2 However the church tower is a more prominent landmark, and there are glimpsed views of the tower from a number of vantage points throughout the Conservation Area as it rises above the surrounding roofline or treeline, such as from the Hill Street - Huncote Road junction, where it is clearly seen in association with the War Memorial, and from across the Soar valley from Croft Pasture.
- 9.3 The Blaby District Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment identifies two gateways into the Conservation Area. The bridge over both the railway and river along Station Road provides a strong gateway into the historic core of the village with the Heathcote Arms in its elevated position being a prominent feature in the views along Station Road. The entrance into the village from the west along Huncote Road is also seen as a strong gateway, but forward views into the Conservation Area are restricted by the sinuous nature of the road and the high granite boundary walls that edge the road.
- 9.4 Similarly the long views along Hill Street are also restricted and channelled by the terraced houses and boundary walls on either side of the street before the view eastwards opens out into the The Green, which provides closure at the head of the vista along Hill Street.
- 9.5 There are also extensive views over the more open landscape to the west of the Conservation Area from Station Road as it crosses the River Soar and distinct views of the church tower from Croft Pasture, showing the relationship of this historic agricultural landscape to the early settlement as well as providing an attractive rural setting to the edge of the Conservation Area.

## 10. ACTIVITY AND PREVAILING USES

- 10.1 The present activities and land uses within the Conservation Area reflect the development of this historic settlement. The evidence from the historic mapping suggests that this area has always been primarily residential, with an historic housing stock that ranges from the post-Medieval to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this residential tradition has continued with the addition of a number of houses built in the last few years.
- 10.2 Croft does not appear to have been large enough to support a local retail or commercial centre, and other than the Heathcote Arms there are few historic retail or commercial uses within the Conservation Area. Although there is some evidence for historic retail premises within the Area: no. 5 Hill Street has the former butchers shop, and opposite, no. 20 Hill Street, appears to have been a shop and post office.
- 10.3 The present village does now have a substantial commercial presence with the Aggregate Industries offices attached to the quarry. This substantial office complex occupies the site of Croft House and the associated farm buildings but, along with the car parking that serves these offices, they have a relatively discrete presence within the Area.
- 10.4 The development and prosperity of the early settlement relied on an agricultural economy based on a system of open fields, meadows and common land and this continued until these lands were enclosed. The legacy of this agricultural economy is reflected in the surviving farmhouses and traditional farm buildings in the Conservation Area, such as the range of traditional farm buildings off The Green, to the south of Dovecote Road, and to the rear of no. 5, Hill Street and also those now used as offices for Aggregate Industries off Huncote Road.
- 10.5 The enclosure of the open fields in 1776 had a profound effect on both the local landscape as well as the economic and social structure of the village, and new sources of employment and industrial development were introduced and the White's Directories of 1846 and 1864 both note that many of the population were employed in framework knitting but there is no surviving evidence of any domestic workshops associated with this industry within the Conservation Area.
- 10.5 The Census however illustrates that these domestic industries were subsequently

replaced by the development of the brickworks and quarry, largely related to the development of railway connections with Leicester, and this phase of industrial development resulted in a large influx of people into the village and the erection of new houses to serve these new workers that now make a significant contribution to the Conservation Area.

- 10.6 The growth in the village during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is also reflected in the improvements and growth of community facilities with a new national school built on Hill Street in 1854 and the erection of the chapel on Dovecote Road.
- 10.7 However as a result of the physical boundary provided by the River Soar this historic settlement and its basic historic street pattern has survived as a distinct entity with the later expansion of Croft during the 20<sup>th</sup> century being located to the south of the River Soar.

## 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER ZONES

11.1 The Conservation Area is typified by a distinctive core of historic buildings with a street pattern that tends to be relatively narrow, with a sense of enclosure created by a mixture of properties and high granite boundary walls, that front directly onto the road, and mature vegetation. The Blaby District Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment recognises that the historic village centre is perceived to be located on the intersection of Station Road, Huncote Road and Hill Street, and the form and nature of development along each of these roads creates quite distinctive character zones within the Conservation Area, complemented by the more open Croft Pasture that lie on the western side of the Conservation Area.

### **Station Road**

11.2 The entrance to the Conservation Area on Station Road is marked by a row of terraced properties that stand on the west side of Station Road (nos. 2 - 8) adjacent to the railway line and these were built as railway men's cottages by the London & North Western Railway Company for the staff at Croft station. This group of two-storey terraced cottages are built in red brick, laid in an English bond of alternating headers and stretchers, with a darker red brick string course beneath the ground and first floor windows.

11.3 The properties in the terrace have a nice rhythm consisting of a series of semi-circular brick arches with a central keystone over the front doors, with a fanlight directly over the door, and a symmetrical arrangement of windows at the ground and first floors. Although the original sash windows have been replaced by UPVC windows in a variety of styles that has degraded the uniformity of the terrace's original appearance, and in two properties the brick has been either painted or rendered.

11.4 Whilst the main terrace is built at right angles to the road, no. 1, Station Road, at the eastern end of the terrace is a larger house (the station master's house) with its main elevation 90° to the main terrace to face onto the main road. The house is built in red brick with a projecting brick porch around the entrance door and the original sliding sash windows at the ground and first floors.

11.5 The approach to the village from Station Road over the River Soar is dominated by views of the Heathcote Arms and the offices of the Aggregate Industries, which sit in an elevated position on the north side of the river, and it leads to the junction with

Huncote Road and Hill Street.

- 11.6 On the north side of Station Road, at its junction with Huncote Road, is the village War Memorial and enclosure, a Grade II listed building that was built in 1920. The war memorial stands in splendid isolation and it is now a prominent feature in the street scene which contributes to the historical and cultural significance of the Conservation Area.

### **Hill Street**

- 11.7 The entrance to Hill Street is marked by two substantial properties, both built in granite, which stand on the south side of the street, the former school and school house (no. 1, Hill Street), and both now converted into residential properties. The school house is a simple L-shaped property with a substantial stone gable, with brick dressings, built at the back edge of the pavement that forms part of the original building as the projecting wing appears to have been added in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 11.8 Immediately to the east is the former school. This has a relatively long frontage to Hill Street that is divided into a number of bays by prominent projecting gables separated by plain pitched roofs, with tall windows along its front elevation that indicate the original internal room layout. The central bay has a more distinctive gothic, triple lancet window and the gable is capped by a bell cote.
- 11.9 Adjacent to the school are a pair of relatively modern houses that are built at right angles to the road and set back from the street frontage. Whilst these houses do not reflect the historic form of the street, the gap between them provides attractive views from Hill Street across the river valley.
- 11.10 The first section of Hill Street on the north side, opposite the school, is defined by a substantial granite boundary wall that extends eastwards from the entrance to the Heathcote Arms car park with a pair of brick piers, some 2m high, and a blocked gateway at the eastern end. The land to the rear is vacant and overgrown, and offers a potential development site. However this wall, which encloses the street scene, makes a significant contribution to the street scene and is worthy of retention in the future.
- 11.11 Beyond this wall the north side of Hill Street comprises of only two detached properties in contrast to the range of terraced properties on the south side. No. 5, Hill

- Street is a large detached house and a Grade II listed building that is set back from the street behind a low granite boundary wall. The property itself is built in granite, which reflects the historic importance of this house and its original occupants, most likely yeoman farmers, although the front elevation is hidden by the trees in the shallow front garden.
- 11.12 To the side of the main house is a smaller single storey annex, the former butchers shop, which is distinguished by its glazed tile frontage and large shop window, and in contrast to the concrete roof tiles on the main property, the butcher's shop has a plain tile roof.
- 11.13 At the rear of no. 5, Hill Street is a range of traditional and modern farm buildings that are largely screened from view by the frontage properties.
- 11.14 Beyond no. 5 is a further detached house that has a particularly interesting front elevation. This property (no. 1, Hill Street) is three bays wide with a granite front elevation up to the first floor windows, and above the elevation has been raised in brick under the eaves, with a slate roof. However the arrangement of the three bays and the balance of the stone and brickwork suggest that this property was originally a timber framed house, most likely with a thatched roof, that has been raised and extended at some point in the past. If this were a timber framed cottage then it would be one of the oldest buildings in the Conservation Area and a number of detached buildings are shown on the north side of Hill Street on John Prior's 1777 map. Although rather sadly any original windows have been replaced with UPVC units.
- 11.15 The properties on the south side of Hill Street, beyond the school, present an almost continuous built up frontage to The Green. Beyond the pair of modern houses is no. 20 Hill Street, a two-storey detached property with a central gable featuring deep bargeboards that adds interest to the character of the street scene. The front elevation of this property suggests that this was previously the village shop and post office, there is a distinctive red post box in the front wall and the two large modern windows, which are clearly later insertions, sit under a fascia panel with its surviving pilaster brackets.
- 11.16 To the east of this property is a terrace of five two-storey cottages (nos. 10 -18, Hill Street). These properties appear to be a replacement for an earlier terrace of buildings shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map, although the later 1888 & 1903

maps show a vacant (orchard) site, suggesting these properties are early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Edwardian) in origin and were most likely built as homes for the quarry workers. This terrace is built in brick, laid in a Flemish Bond, with a projecting string course of three bricks between the ground and first floors, although the first floor seems to be built in a different brick from the ground floor and may originally have been rendered. The eaves of the terrace are broken by a series of gables which adds visual interest to the street scene. However the original doors and windows have been replaced by new UPVC units in a variety of styles that has degraded the original uniformity of the terrace's appearance.

- 11.17 To the east is a row of three two-storey terraced cottages (nos. 4 - 8, Hill Street) that are shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map. These properties are smaller than the neighbouring terrace and have a more random arrangement of windows and doors across the front elevation suggesting that these houses are more rural in origin and as such they reflect the agricultural traditions of the village.
- 11.18 To the east of these properties is a single detached house (no. 2, Hill Street), that may also be shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map. This house is built of granite with its gable facing onto the back of the footpath with deep overhanging eaves.

### **The Green**

- 11.19 At the head of Hill Street, and closing the view eastwards, is a terrace of two storey properties (nos. 1 – 6, The Green) that were built as homes for the quarry workers and are also shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map. These properties have a distinctive stepped roof line that reflects the changing land levels across the site and are built in red brick, laid in a Flemish bond. These houses have also retained their original, and distinctive, pointed gothic sliding sash windows framed by brick arches (perhaps it is more difficult to replace such windows in UPVC), preserving something of the original historic character of these properties.
- 11.20 At the left-hand end of this terrace is the vacant former bakehouse that stands alongside the original road that extended to the now demolished Orchard Street at the rear of Dovecote Road. Planning permission has been granted for the refurbishment of this property and for the erection of a detached dwelling on the north side of this roadway (application ref. no. 14/0793/1/PX).
- 11.21 The Green also extends to the south of Dovecote Road with a cluster of houses and

farm buildings that are shown on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map and may also have been shown on Prior's 1777 map. The three properties consist of two two-storey properties and a single three-storey property (no. 9, The Green) that together by their design and appearance reflect the agricultural tradition of the village. In particular no. 9, The Green appears to be a former farmhouse with a symmetrical front elevation comprising of a centrally placed entrance door on the ground floor and two columns of windows on either side that reduce in size through the elevation, with surviving horizontal sliding sash windows in the upper floors.

- 11.22 To the rear of these properties is a range of red brick historic farm buildings, that includes a former threshing barn, which provides clear evidence of the agricultural based economy in the village.

### **Dovecote Road**

- 11.23 Dovecote Road extends to the east of The Green, and on the north side of Dovecote Road is a row of double fronted terrace properties (nos. 2, 4, 5 & 6) that were built as homes for quarry workers and these also appear on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map. This terrace is built in red brick, laid in a Flemish bond, with a serrated red brick string course below the first floor windows. Whilst these properties have lost their original windows and doors, these have been replaced by UPVC units in a similar style throughout the terrace which has retained some of the uniformity of the terrace's original appearance even though the original fittings have been lost.
- 11.24 At the eastern end of Dovecote Road is the vacant former chapel and this is now a relatively isolated building as it is separated from the neighbouring houses on Dovecote Road by a vacant parcel of land, for which planning permission has been given for three town houses (application ref. no. 14/0869/1/OX), and it is also surrounded immediately to the east and north by the quarry complex.
- 11.25 The front elevation of the chapel is built of Croft granite in three different stages, with a coursed stone ground floor, a random granite first-floor and a coursed stone gable, with a central front door leading to a front porch, with two gothic windows either side of the door and three windows at the first floor. The windows are framed by ashlar architraving and projecting hood-moulds, with heads depicting Victorian gentlemen carved into the label stops that may show the four dignitaries that laid the foundation stones, namely the Mayor of Leicester, Alderman John Bennet, Councillor Mather, Henry Davis Pochin and Samuel Davenport Pochin. The side elevations, which are

buttressed, are built in red brick over a random rubble base with a further three gothic windows.

### **Huncote Road**

- 11.26 The western side of the Conservation Area, along Huncote Road, is characterised by a more disparate arrangement of properties than along Hill Street and Dovecote Road.
- 11.27 The Heathcote Arms stands at the eastern end of Huncote Road and it has a long frontage that is constructed of brick, now painted white, on a brick plinth with a series of casement windows across its front elevation.
- 11.28 On the opposite (south) side of Huncote Road is a low two-storey rendered property that sits between the road and the river on what may have originally been waste ground.
- 11.29 To the west of the Heathcote Arms is a substantial granite boundary wall along the road frontage that stands to the front of a two storey former stone built farmhouse and a range of farm buildings that have been converted and extended for use as offices associated with Aggregate Industries.
- 11.30 To the side of this complex of buildings is the Grade II listed St Michael and All Angels Church, that in part is the oldest building in the village. The church stands in an elevated position, although it is set back from the main road behind its churchyard with a row of mature trees and a boundary wall along the road frontage.
- 11.31 On the western side of the churchyard is the access road to Croft House and the Aggregate Industries offices. Croft House is a substantial two-storey complex that has been much extended and altered, but it retains an attractive stone door surround with fluted columns and a rain hood supported by carved brackets, with the name Croft House inscribed in the lintel above the door. The proximity of Croft House to the church shows the historic and spatial relationship between the church and Croft House.
- 11.32 The access road past Croft House leads to a large car parking area for the offices, although this is generally well screened from views from Huncote Road. Tucked into the land behind Croft House is a further detached two storey dwelling, which has a

more prominent rear elevation to Huncote Road. This house has a stone built ground floor with a rendered first-floor above with a distinctive pyramidal roof and it is Edwardian in appearance, although a building is shown in this location on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map.

- 11.33 On the south side of Huncote Road opposite the church is the former rectory, a substantial three-storey detached house, built in granite with stone dressings and mullions and transom windows, that is set back behind a granite boundary wall. Other than the impressive scale and design of this house, the most prominent architectural feature is the central bay on the front elevation which contains a substantial ashlar panel that extends through the ground floor into the first floor. Inset into this panel is the main entrance door on the ground floor, with an elaborate cross motif carved into the lintel above the door, and triple lancet and cinquefoil windows at the first floor level, illustrating the original ecclesiastical purpose of this property and the social status of its original occupants.
- 11.34 Beyond the Old Rectory is Beech Tree Cottage, a small two-storey cottage set back from the road at the western end of the Conservation Area.

## 12. ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES OF THE BUILDINGS

### Essential Characteristics

12.1 The built environment within Croft presents a diversity of architectural styles, forms and features that underline the major phases of the village's historic development. The typical architectural forms and characteristics are:

- A mix of detached and terraced housing;
- Almost continuous built up frontages along Hill Street and Dovecote Street with articulated building lines, with most buildings fronting directly onto the pavement;
- A uniformity of scale, mostly 2-storey construction with an occasional 3-storey property;
- Typically red brick construction, with some use of render, in the domestic properties and with the use of granite in the more notable buildings, with a range of roof coverings;
- Traditional pitched roofs with main elevations to the street providing a strong horizontal emphasis that are occasionally broken by gables fronting onto the street;
- Windows are generally arranged in a symmetrical fashion on the principal elevation and in proportion to the building type, and window and door openings are also framed by distinctive cills and lintels;
- Simple detailing to the main elevations with some decorative detailing to eaves and projecting lintels and cills to window openings with brick arches over doors;
- Low-to-medium chimney-stacks with a variety of clay pot styles.
- Some surviving ranges of agricultural buildings behind the street frontages;
- Prominent granite boundary walls, particularly along Huncote Road and the lower end of Hill Street.

### Building Materials

12.2 There is a range of building materials in the Conservation Area, although for domestic properties red brick is most commonly used, typically laid in a Flemish bond to add visual interest to the front elevations of the properties, and there is also the occasional use of render but this is not a prominent feature within the village. Given the access to granite many of the larger and more important buildings in the Area are also constructed in uncoursed granite and stone is widely used in the boundary walls that are a common feature of the Area.

- 12.3 In contrast to this uniformity, there is a mix of traditional roofing materials with plain tiles and Welsh slates used throughout the village, often with a decorative ridge tile, although a sizable proportion of houses have replaced these with concrete roof tiles that detract from the appearance of the Area.
- 12.4 Given the variety of property types in the Area there is also a range of window styles and sliding sash and casement windows are most common throughout the Area, often framed by distinctive lintels and projecting cills.
- 12.5 Unfortunately only a few of the historic properties have retained their original timber windows, the most notable examples being the gothic style, sliding sash windows in the properties on The Green and the rare examples of a horizontal (Yorkshire) sliding sash windows in no. 9, The Green, that reflects a more vernacular architectural tradition. However a considerable proportion of houses have lost their original timber windows and doors, which have been replaced by UPVC units that lack the scale and proportion of the originals and detract from the appearance of the Area, particularly when individual and different styles of window are used in the same terrace disrupting the harmony of its original design, such as along Hill Street and Station Road.

### **13. CONTRIBUTION MADE BY GREEN SPACES AND TREES**

- 13.1 Whilst the quarry and its ancillary operational site lies along the northern and eastern edge of the Conservation Area, and often exerting a considerable physical and visual presence, the Area has also retained a significant amount of natural planting and there are also a number of important open spaces both within and on the edge of the Conservation Area that contribute to its overall appearance and setting.
- 13.2 There are a number of trees throughout the Area, of varying quality and type, and whilst some of the more notable examples are protected by tree preservation order, the remaining trees within the Conservation Area are also given an additional degree of protection with consent needed to carry out works or to fell trees. Although as many of the trees fall within public or charitable ownership it is envisaged that these bodies will operate suitable management plans to ensure the long-term maintenance of the existing tree cover.
- 13.3 Important tree groups within the Conservation Area include those within the embankment alongside the junction of Huncote Road with Hill Street and along the north side of Hill Street, which help to soften the overall built environment when the tight-knit terraced housing along Hill Street and Dovecote Road limits the opportunities for any tree planting. On the west side of the village Huncote Road is bounded by an almost continuous frontage of stone walls with a number of mature trees lining the route within the grounds of the churchyard, the Aggregate Industries site and The Old Rectory.
- 13.4 The Area also benefits from a number of attractive open spaces that contribute to the character and appearance of the Area. These areas range from relatively small sites, such as the embankment alongside Huncote Road with Hill Street, and the grassed area in front of the properties on The Green, to the larger open spaces that are located both within and on the edge of the Conservation Area along the Soar valley.
- 13.5 The largest green space in the Conservation Area is the Croft Pasture. This area of land not only provides a valuable ecological and recreational resource, but it also contributes to the distinctive and historic setting of the Conservation Area, reflecting the influence of the River Soar on the development of the village, and also includes The Clevis, a rocky outcrop on the north side of the river used by the Romans as a granite quarry.

## **14. ISSUES, PRESSURES AND THREATS**

- 14.1 Certain elements within the Conservation Area can detract from its special character such as the impact of new development and well-intentioned, but unsympathetic home improvements, and unsightly gap sites and semi-derelict buildings.
- 14.2 More recent developments in the Conservation Area have had a mixed impact on its character and appearance, some of the more recent housing development does not sit easily within the street scene, where as a result of their layout and overall design, they do not fit with the prevailing historic architectural styles and built form.
- 14.3 Paragraph 137 of the NPPF encourages local planning authorities to look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas. However the designation of the Conservation Area provides an opportunity to exercise greater control over such issues as design, appearance and siting so that any new development, and there are a number of gap sites along Hill Street and Dovecote Road, can be accommodated in a sympathetic manner into the Conservation Area with a considered approach to issues such as design, siting and the use of more traditional materials and the size and arrangement of window openings.
- 14.4 As noted there are a number of gap sites within the Conservation Area and in some cases planning permission has already been granted for the redevelopment of sites along Hill Street and Dovecote Road. In addition to these opportunity sites, the former chapel at the eastern end of Dovecote Street is a notable vacant building that makes a significant contribution to the Conservation Area. In its present condition the building is at some risk and detracts from the street scene, but the loss of this historic building would seriously erode the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its overall significance. Efforts should therefore be made to arrest its decline so that it can be brought forward for a sympathetic conversion as an integral part of the development proposals on the adjoining land for which there is consent for the erection of three town houses (ref. 14/0869/OX) and which has just been sold subject to contract.
- 14.5 The character and appearance of the Conservation Area has also been eroded by often well-intentioned home improvements, that do not require planning permission, such as the replacement of traditional roofing materials with concrete roof tiles and the insertion of UPVC double-glazed windows and doors that have replaced more

traditional architectural fittings.

- 14.6 These changes are undertaken under the permitted development allowances and without an Article 4 Direction to control these improvements the historic character and fabric of the Conservation Area will continue to diminish.

## APPENDIX 1: DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS & KEY UNLISTED BUILDINGS WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

### Listed Buildings

Despite having a considerable range of historic buildings, only 4 buildings and structures within the Croft Conservation Area are designated as listed buildings and therefore afforded statutory protection. These are:

- Church of St Michael and All Angels, Huncote Road (Grade II)
- Stone coffin to the south of the nave at Church of St Michael and All Angels, Huncote Road (Grade II)
- War Memorial cross and enclosure, Huncote Road (Grade II)
- No. 5, Hill Street and the adjoining boundary wall and butchers shop (Grade II)

### Contribution of Unlisted Buildings

In addition to the statutory listed buildings, many of the unlisted buildings within the Conservation Area make an important contribution to its character or appearance, and these can include, for example: landmark buildings; buildings that provide evidence of the chronological development of the Conservation Area; buildings that reflect former uses; or buildings that hold significance to the local community.

Those unlisted buildings that make a particularly significant contribution to the Croft Conservation Area are considered to be:

#### Huncote Road:

Croft House;  
The Old Rectory

#### Station Road:

Nos. 1 - 8;

#### Hill Street:

The School House;  
The former school;  
No. 1, Hill Street;  
Nos. 4 -18 Hill Street;

#### The Green:

Nos. 1 – 6;  
No. 9;  
Former agricultural buildings to rear of nos. 7 - 9;

#### Dovecote Street:

Former Union Chapel