Response to Shropshire Council

The comments of our conservation consultant are as follows and are divided into sections to concur with those areas omitted. It is heartening to see that a Local Authority has at last taken cognisance of the special architectural and historic interest of some areas of West Felton, after decades of much of the data sitting in archive and its subsequent loss in transit to Shirehall, but note with dismay the exclusion of the following areas itemised under headings Section 1 to 4 all of which satisfy the NPPF criteria of “When considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.”

**Section 1- Stone House plus the attractive lanes/tracks leading to the front of the building and the track now acting as a rear access but formerly an important trackway of the earlier medieval/post medieval landscape connecting the Holyhead Road to Oak Farm and Bishop’s Farm, with its significant name. As such this trackway is demonstrable of the early landscape associated with outliers to the early core of West Felton, representing possible early enclosures in a wooded landscape.**

Stone House is clearly a very significant and substantial gentry house of the mid-late Victorian period, (see the map regression for exact date of inception) whose omission and that of its trackways fore and aft, the latter being of considerable aesthetic quality and flanked by a number of stone outbuildings, appears to have no foundation apart from excluding the frontage lane which is flanked by some modern development, (possibly the 1970s, itself now regarded as vintage) well screened with hedges (a feature of all of the Holyhead Rd fronting houses of some vintage), and having thus acquired some rural ambience.

This is an omission which is simply not acceptable and it is respectfully requested that the property and the lanes be included.

**Section 2- The properties listed as follows along the Holyhead Road, in groups, indicative of their original function.**

2.1. The remarkable survival of a group of social history importance, consisting of two police houses and a nurses/maternity unit of the early 20thC, with tall hedges abutting the main road, giving a rural ambience.

2.2. **Vine Villas** whose name indicates a derivation from the name of an inn and together with its stable-block would appear to be one of the inns associated with the coaching trade. There has been no cognisance of its importance in recent decades but fortunately enough remains to indicate its special historic interest.

2.3. **Milne Croft** – a far superior example of a purpose built coaching inn and **Mill Loon farm**, both superior examples of their type connected with the coaching inn trade, and built by wealthy yeoman farmers in the old village in the early years of the 19thC (see map regression for exact dates) as a response to what was perceived to be a golden business opportunity, and which should be listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. Their omission would leave them in jeopardy of elimination of this important aspect of WF’s heritage.

2.4. **The Smithy and Wheelwrights -** Of even greater importance due to the early origin of the site as an ‘outlier’ farm to the old village (former clearing in the woodland) and joined to the Old Village by Fox Lane (named after the outlier on the opposite corner which became yet another Inn). The Smithy and the separate Wheelwrights, were probably a response to the coaching trade as well serving the local farms. The Smithy with its magnificent oak tree on the opposite corner, abuts Tedsmore Lane. leading to the Tedsmore Estate which the research indicated was of considerable importance in its own right in the medieval period. Thus this group is highly significant for a number of factors being part of that complex of lanes/tracks connecting outliers to the medieval core, other tracks being Higsons Lane and Stonehouse Lane, as well as that which became the Avenue.

All these groups have been carefully researched to capture their importance to early settlement and the later coaching trade that spawned far too many inns to have merely served an agricultural labourer population. The evidence was presented in text and map regression form. Either this research has not been fully understood or it is sadly being discounted. It would appear that these significant sites are to be omitted simply because of their discontinuity which was itself the result of their open countryside setting being disregarded in recent planning decisions, as a result of their origin not being understood. The gaps between these groups were in fact the result of their early or later commercial origin, and should not have been regarded as opportunities for infill, as this was never a ‘street village’ in the accepted sense of the word. In today’s planning parlance such infill in open countryside settings would surely find disfavour . Can their significance really be cast aside on this basis?

How does the Local Authority intend to protect this heritage and is it satisfactory to accept that this heritage must be eliminated for lack of protection because less than satisfactory planning decisions have been made in respect of their settings due to a lack of understanding of their significance? Some vague element of protection could be offered by local listing but it will not protect from total demolition.

**Section 3 – The Bishops Farm and Oak Farm.**

These farmsteads appear to be outliers to the ancient core of West Felton, and demonstrate not only a close relationship with other ‘outliers’ on the Holyhead Road ( e.g. Plough Cottage and The Old Smithy), being reached by a series of historic tracks (Higsons’s Lane Stonehouse Lane, Tedsmore Lane and the later termed School Lane forming a triangle set within a trapezium of early transport lanes joining Oak Lane and Twyford Lane), but are important examples of farming history and narrative in their own right via their farmhouses and farm buildings, with the Bishop’s farmhouse becoming the School in late 19thC to replace that which had been set into a cross roads in the Old Village Core. In this sense this area cannot be divorced in meaning from the old village core and as such their relationship to it is thus significant. The propensity for their elimination and loss of their setting by new development not only of their buildings but also their setting, is obvious.

How does the Local Authority intend to protect the heritage set out above, with modern development pressures creeping ever closer?

**Section 4 - The Remains of the Dovaston Estate**

The Dovaston Estate was of considerable significance to the history of West Felton whose historic development was heavily influenced by a number of neighbouring estates, as itemised in the research presented. Not only were the Dovaston family recognised as philanthropists and polymaths, but they were the providers of much of the tree and hedge vegetation bounding numerous enclosure roads/fields in the vicinity and probably further afield all over Shropshire. That there has been such woeful disregard of the importance of this site in planning decisions in recent decades is lamentable. Here is an opportunity to redress this unfortunate situation and to provide protection for a whole series of features within this area of the site, to include the stone boundary wall now hidden in creeping vegetation, but which abuts a considerable length of Twyford Lane, the entrance gateway from Twyford lane, representing as it does the only unmolested gateway structure to the estate, (the others having been rebuilt in various guises and manipulated to reflect the desire of the latest developer), the listed and unlisted outbuildings, all of which are in a parlous state, some already in an advanced state of collapse and decay due to lack of management for decades, the medieval re-sited archway, now so unloved it is barely reachable, and partly covered in vegetation, and last but not least, the many trees, some planted by the zealous Dovastons (abutting the stone wall boundary), and some which are their seedlings from these trees, many of which are acknowledged in arboriculture circles to be extremely rare and recorded as such. All is set within an ever growing wilderness of giant hogweed and nettles criss-crossed by footpaths created by occupants of the adjacent housing estate as desire lines for dog walking. The elucidation of this important fragment of the estate followed careful fieldwork.

One must ask what is the future for this important only remaining area of the historic Dovaston Estate and how are the Local Authority going to protect the remaining features to include the boundary wall, gateway, outbuildings, medieval arch and Dovaston trees if the area is not going be included as an identity zone within the conservation area. How will the Local Authority continue to rebut the pressure for development the demands for which will surely grow as time proceeds, especially as an unfortunate precedent has been set with the bulk of the Dovaston site, if the area is not included in a conservation area. Not only is management required to protect the historic features but the area must be given a viable future and creating a conservation area to include it would be a valuable first step. Many of the locals favour allotments and others believe it should be managed as a countryside park with appropriate mowing and repair/use of the buildings. One would go a long way to find another area so desperately in need of careful consideration for its management.

We must thus respectfully request that this area be included as a separate identity zone within the conservation area to include the farm complexes known as Bishops Farm and Oak Farm.

**Conclusion**

**In conclusion it is regrettable that so little cognisance appears to have been taken of the extensive research over a two year period and the care taken to present the evidence so that the significance of the various zones was clearly indicated in relation to their special architectural and historic interest. Whilst it is understood that that the area around the Cross is the most visually cohesive, this does not take account of all the other areas that are of special architectural or historic Interest and includes only one purpose built coaching inn (whose future is uncertain) and one conversion to a coaching inn (Plough Cottage). This will not tell the story of the many inns that proliferated along Holyhead Road. Initially consideration was given to presenting the zones as separate entities, numbered accordingly but as they were joined by historic roads e.g. The Holyhead Rd and tracks e.g. Higsons Lane, that were clearly part of the historic fabric, it was decided that these were the glue that held the areas together.**

**Nowhere in the legislation does it say that boundaries have to demonstrate coherence or be easy to administer in planning terms, rather there is an emphasis on ‘special architectural and historic interest, which in the case of the omitted areas is abundantly clear, ranging from early farm outliers, through the coaching trade with their coaching inns, to early 20thC health and social reform.**

**The proposed boundary deliberately included a number of zones reflecting differing aspects of special architectural or historic interest with a heavy emphasis on the latter and followed many hours of meticulous research and fieldwork. It is accepted that it is somewhat out of the norm but there are many village and towns in the British Isles whose conservation area consists of a number of identity areas or zones, that are not connected, each of which reflects a different type of historical development. A simple example in Shropshireis Bridgnorth High Town and Low Town. In addition there is a need to deviate away from the norm is as a result of the way that the Holyhead Road has been dealt with in the Post War era with no real understanding of its origin and historical development, scant regard of the setting of individual designated and non-designated heritage assets and no cognisance of the fact that this was no ordinary street village where historically infill would NOT have been the accepted pattern. Here the historic buildings were designed to be separated out as they were either working farms of commercially operated coaching inns relying on separation from neighbours for prosperity.**

**It is thus essential that the questions posed in red are addressed as soon as you are able to respond. Individual building groups to the south east on the Holyhead Road could perhaps be addressed with a local listing currently favoured by the existing government but this will not protect from total demolition, the results of which are all too evident with the loss of the Fox Inn that was not only an early farm complex and later coaching inn conversion but which gave its name to Fox Lane. (Future generations will spend a long time puzzling over the origin of the this name). Had the CA been in place four decades ago this may well not have happened?**

**Finally it is now six months since the extensive consultation conducted by the PC. Comments were collected at an exhibition regarded as superlative by the village, and represent a large sample of village inhabitants. A letter of endorsement for the original boundary proposed was also submitted by Oswestry Civic Society, the chair attending the exhibition. A further consultation now without any of the visual evidence previously provided might only serve to confuse. It is noted that no further consultation was needed at Kinnerley, also a recent designation. The questionnaire, that was solely based on that for Kinnerley, elicited responses that indicated not only a strong desire for the heritage of West Felton to be recognised and protected but a deep and abiding concern about the extent of development.**