

WESTNEWTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



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This Conservation Area Appraisal was prepared in October 2008 by Lindsay Cowle (Conservation Consultant) on behalf of Allerdale Borough Council, Cumbria. The Appraisal was agreed by the Development Panel of the Council in 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Historic Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. In addition, authorities are required to carry out periodic reviews of the conservation areas under their control.
- 1.2 Section 71 of the same Act requires local authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to submit them to a public meeting for consideration. Following designation the local authority, in exercising its planning powers, must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area (Section 72 of the Act).
- 1.3 Westnewton is situated two miles north of Aspatria in West Cumbria, and was designated as a conservation area by Allerdale Borough Council (then Allerdale District Council) in 1981.
- 1.4 This documents provides a character appraisal of the conservation area and the four principal sections are Sections 3-6. Section 3 sets the scene by analysing the history and general context of the conservation area; Section 4 describes the area in detail; Section 5 outlines its defining characteristics; and Section 6 makes suggestions for its future management.

2 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The village of Westnewton is situated to the north-west of the Lake District, on the relatively flat plain half way between the Lake District hills and the Solway Firth. It is a small village located two miles north of Aspatria, on the B5301 Aspatria to Silloth road. The landscape generally in this area is one of gently undulating fields, relatively devoid of features other than the thorn field-hedges, with shallow valleys carrying small streams.
- 2.2 The settlement is physically self-contained, extending north-east to south-west along the broad base of a shallow valley carrying a small stream. There are rising fields on either side and the valley floor narrows again at its head and foot, limiting the extent of flat land suitable for building and providing a sense of enclosure on all sides. Approached from all main directions the village is therefore largely concealed from view until just before it is entered.



Area Map

3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Westnewton (until the 20th century spelled 'West Newton') is located in an area of West Cumbria which is sparsely populated and for which little evidence of pre-historic activity survives: crop marks in the area around the village may suggest early human activity but the nearest firm evidence is a Bronze Age barrow near Aspatria. Activity increased during the Roman occupation, with the defences against Scottish invasion along the Solway coast, but little evidence survives inland. Anglo-Danish and Norman settlement is more evident, again in Aspatria, but not outside established settlements.

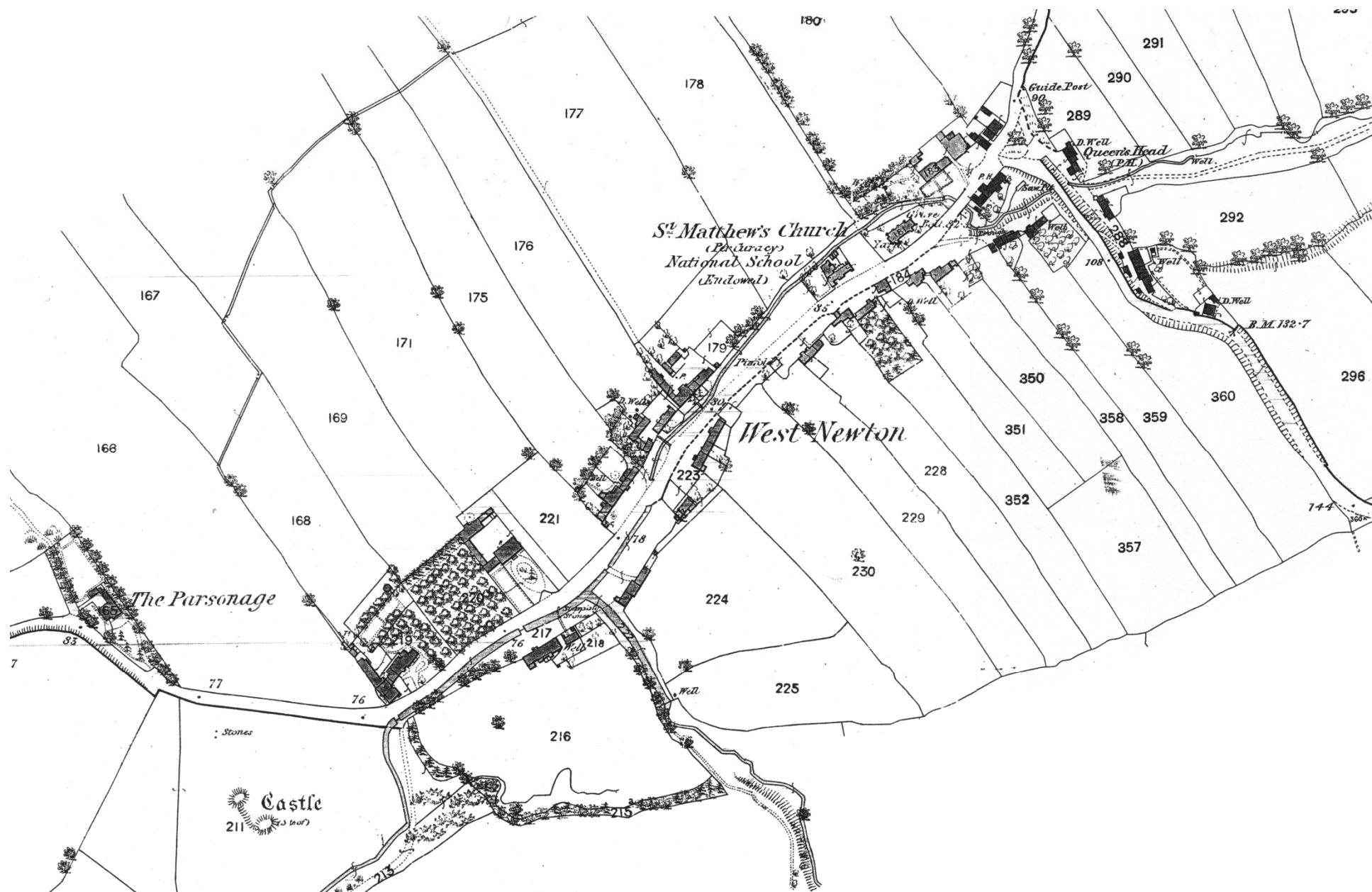
3.2 There is therefore little evidence that Westnewton existed before the Mediaeval period, although it may stand on an earlier communication route. At this point the Aspatria to Silloth road crosses Westnewton Beck and also intersects with the road from Allonby to Wigton, all of them no doubt seeking a convenient fording point. The flat land of the valley bottom in this strategic but sheltered location, with a good water supply and fertile fields surrounding it, made it ideal for an agricultural settlement. Yearn Gill also joins the valley at this point, offering a further

good source of water in Sandwith Beck.

3.3 Westnewton derives its name from the de Neuton family, who were lords of the manor in the late 12th and 13th centuries, having received it through Odard, Sheriff of Wigton in the mid 12th century. The manor passed briefly by marriage to the Martindale family and then by the late 15th century to the powerful Musgrave and Hylton families of Hayton Castle near Allonby. Their ownership ceased in the early 19th century when the manor finally passed by marriage to the Joliffe family, who are recorded as being the owners until the early 20th century.

3.4 The site of Westnewton Castle, at the western end of the village and close to the stream, may mark the baronial home of the de Neuton family and the start of the settlement which bears their name. However, the surviving ruins - now just limited to grassy mounds and faint ditches - are now thought to be those of a mediaeval manor house, fortified or ornamented by a moat and gatehouse. The natural meander in the stream and the flatness of the land would readily lend the site to being moated.





3.5 It therefore seems likely that the manor house was built here by the Musgrave family when they acquired the manor in the late 15th or early 16th century. But by the late 18th century it was unused and in ruins, although the manorial courts were still held in the village until the late 19th century. Significantly, there was a post-mediaeval corn mill in Yearn Gill a short distance to the south east, powered by Sandwith Beck.

3.6 Other farmhouses were built in the valley, upstream of the manor house, presumably by tenants of the manor: the earliest and most notable survival is Yew Tree Farmhouse, dated 1672, which was a house of some status. The village pinfold stood on the opposite side of the stream, near Burn View. The land to either side of the stream became more developed with ad hoc farmsteads, and under the Enclosure Acts the fields rising up to either side were divided into narrow strips which still survive to the present day, and which are particularly noticeable on the southern side of the valley.

3.7 The 18th and early 19th centuries saw the village evolve to more or less its existing form, but lack of records and alterations to buildings make it difficult to trace this growth. The buildings all seem to have been either farmsteads – often with large ranges of outbuildings – or farmworkers' cottages. By 1811 the population was 223, rising gradually to 347 by 1851.

3.8 High status farmhouses were built at the western end, closest to the manor house (Westnewton Hall of the early 19th century, followed by Westnewton Grange in the mid 19th century) with buildings of lesser status to the east. At the eastern end the Aspatria to Silloth Road was flanked on one side by the Swan Inn and on the other by the Queen's Head inn at the ford (now Raeburn House). One or two houses of quality were built at this end (Bridge End Farm and Croft View).

3.9 The status of the village increased in 1848 when it was provided with a school for 84 children, but this was replaced by a grander building in 1858. The benefactor was John Todd, a Manchester businessman of some wealth who was a native of the village. He also built St Matthews

Church in 1856, together with a Vicarage at the western end of the village (1858) and a row of four imposing houses opposite the school (St Matthew's Cottages) presumably as almshouses or for other village worthies.



Yew Tree Farmhouse



Enclosed fields southeast of village

3.10 The proper embanking of the stream and the construction of its two road bridges seem to date from this period, together with the re-grading of the Aspatria road at the entrance to the village, avoiding the previous ford.

3.11 The new social institutions seem to have taken some time to take effect, as Bulmer's Directory of 1883 says that 'Although the houses are generally very clean, yet the people have not been remarkable either for good morals or for keeping their village in commendable order. This was owing, in a great measure, to the want of religious and secular education.'

3.12 Historical records starting in the late 1800's show the overwhelming occupation of the residents to be agriculture-based, being predominantly farmsteads and their related businesses (smithying, stone-walling, quarrying, milling etc), and this has probably always been the case. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries coal mining along the Solway coast provided a further source of employment.

3.13 Prior to the introduction of motor transport, and particularly widespread car ownership, Westnewton would have been relatively self-supporting and a hive of economic activity, centred around agriculture but including a range of trades exchanged between the residents such as shoe-making, tailoring, merchandising, food production, cooking, and laundering. The church and the inns would be the hubs of community activity and social interchange.

3.14 Westnewton was made a separate ecclesiastical parish in the late 1800's along with Langrigg and Mealrigg, with a total population of 443. It was made a civil parish in 1896. The population of the village itself had risen to around 400 by the start of the Second World War and has been boosted since the war by 'The Guards' housing estate at west end of the village. The Post House opposite the school is shown as being a Post Office (and village shop) by 1900. The village hall was built shortly after World War One (originally as the village reading room) next to Yew Tree House, and a new burial ground was opened next to the vicarage.

3.15 The village now still retains many working farmsteads, interspersed with some modern houses and bungalows, but its character remains firmly agricultural.



St. Matthews Church



Village School and Schoolhouse



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Conservation Area boundary map

4 DESCRIPTION

- 4.1 Approaching Westnewton from the west, the road from Allonby runs high above the north flank of Westnewton Beck, passing through open pasture land and cereal fields crossed by sporadic thorn hedges, before making a twisting descent into the village. The village can be broadly described as being in gently undulating and relatively featureless countryside, spread out along an unusually wide and flat section of the valley floor so that it is sheltered and concealed from view until the point of entry.
- 4.2 The first buildings encountered are excluded from the Conservation Area since, apart from the vicarage, they consist of modern houses and in particular 'The Guards' post-war housing estate. However, the Conservation Area commences with the site of Westnewton Castle, behind the housing estate, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the oldest evidence of habitation in the village. Little obvious evidence of this mediaeval hall survives other than low grass mounds and traces of its moat, but it is of great historical

importance to the settlement. The setting of the Monument, although spoiled by the housing estate immediately to the north, is framed on the south and east sides by the gently rising fields beyond, and on the west side by the narrower continuation of the valley.

- 4.3 The main part of the Conservation Area is entered at a well-defined point where the road from Allonby swings left into the main village street past the first of the historic farmsteads. The

main characteristics of the village are immediately visible from this point onwards – the main street with its generous grass verges; the beck following the south side of the road between grassy embankments and crossed at intervals by small flat bridges with simple handrails; mature trees; and buildings set well back on both sides. The Conservation Area boundary follows the immediate rear curtilages of the properties, but the rising fields beyond provide visual containment.



streetscape, but there are one or two modern incongruous bungalows.

- 4.4 Looking back towards the west the Conservation Area includes a modern brick pumping station and two modern bungalows beyond the bend (Westcroft and Lammtarra) which are not included for their intrinsic value but because their sites terminate the main street visually.
- 4.5 Continuing eastwards, two of the better quality houses - Westnewton House and Westnewton Grange – stand to the north of the main street, and are exceptional in being totally stuccoed. The Grange is a fine classical early-mid 19th century farmhouse Listed Grade II, with its front driveway bounded by a low wall with decorative iron railings. Westnewton Lodge (- an earlier outbuilding now converted to a third dwelling) is dated 1692.
- 4.6 Westnewton Hall beyond is a plainer but well composed early 19th century farmhouse Listed Grade II, with a low front wall topped by rounded copings and with decorative stone gate piers,

also Listed Grade II: attractive high walls of red sandstone ashlar screen the more functional agricultural buildings to one side.

- 4.7 To the south of the main street Yearn Gill joins the main beck between two more modest and altered farmsteads, Home Farm and Ghyll Farm: the former has a very solid late 19th century farmhouse of red sandstone. Livestock and large complexes of farm outbuildings throughout the village confirm its continuing agricultural role, although many outbuildings have been re-roofed in modern sheet materials or are of totally modern construction.
- 4.8 Towards the centre of the village the buildings consist of more modest farmhouses and workers cottages, many of which have been modernised, all fairly randomly placed. Attractive walled gardens to the houses (eg Bridge House and Brookside) add interest to the



Westnewton House and Grange



Westnewton Hall



Farm workers' cottages – Brookside

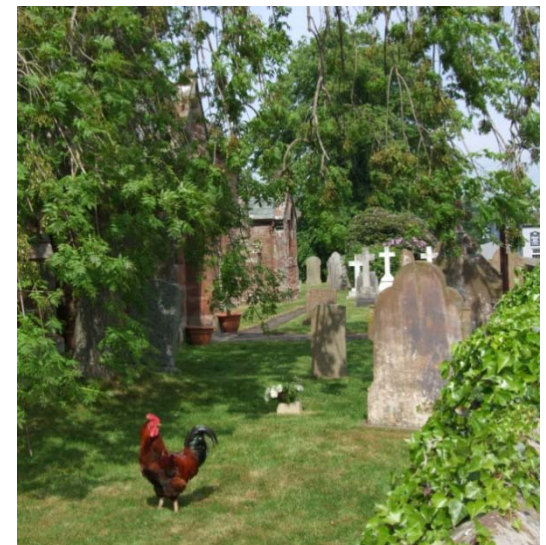
- 4.9 The beck crosses to the north side of the road via a long angled bridge and thereafter the grass margins tend to be wider on the north side and attractive views open up towards the eastern end of the village. There are frequent views between buildings and up side tracks to the rising fields beyond, confirming the agricultural setting. Those to the southeast reveal long, narrow fields separated by thorn hedges and ending at a more distant horizon.
- 4.10 In the centre of the village the severely functional 1952 village hall adjoins Yew Tree Farm which is a fine classical farmhouse of 1672 fronted by ancient yew trees, and

Listed Grade II. Beyond, the beck moves further northwards away from the road behind a screen of trees and the unmetalled village carpark (- sadly the location of the village recycling bins -), whilst on the south side of the street is a modern ranch-type house (Newton Lea).

- 4.11 At this point, pauses in the street frontages and changes of building type mark a perceptible break between the western and eastern halves of the village.
- 4.12 The eastern half of the village starts with a nucleus of three distinctive Victorian buildings of architectural and social importance. To the north is the village school of 1858 with its attached schoolmaster's house. Beyond is St Matthews Church (1856) whose slender west tower is the focal point of the main street to the west: the mature graveyard with its headstones, laurel bushes and mature willow tree is an attractive feature in the townscape and a peaceful enclosed space. Opposite are the four combined red sandstone St Matthews Cottages of the same

date, which are quite different in their scale and formality to any other domestic buildings in the village.

- 4.13 All three buildings owe their existence to the Victorian benefactor John Todd and share similarities of style. The churchyard wall and school railings finish hard against the highway, in contrast to the rest of the village. Interest is added to the group by The Post House (the former village shop and post office) which steps forward against the highway to provide a 'pinch point' in the street.



Churchyard



St. Matthews Cottages

4.14 Beyond the church the beck re-crosses the main road under a stone bridge, flowing between overgrown banks, and the buildings widen out to north and south in random fashion as they meet the junction with the Aspatria to Silloth road. To the north, the main street meets the road at a grassy island containing mature trees, and a traditional cast iron signpost, with attractive houses facing it (Croft View and Holme Croft). Croft View has a formal frontage and stands forward, providing a visual 'stop' to the main street and to the road entering from Aspatria. Bridge End Farm has an attractive walled garden and fine barns with circular ventilation holes, although marred by modern sheet roof coverings.

4.15 To the south, a short lane branches off the main street and runs alongside Westnewton Beck, serving minor cottages and farm buildings, and including two modern houses. An attractive public footpath links the end of the lane to the Aspatria road

via a flight of stone steps. Between the lane and the main street the much altered Swan Inn stands on an island site with overgrown land to the rear: this land is the site of saw pit which existed until the late 1800's, presumably powered by the beck.



The Swan Inn



Bridge End Farm



Croft View

4.16 The buildings to the east of the Aspatria – Silloth road are now somewhat divorced visually from the rest of the village due to the embankment (dating from at least before the mid 1800's) carrying the Aspatria road down into the village over the culverted beck. Hitherto this would presumably have been a steep winding track leading down to the existing ford, and the farmhouses either side (Orchard House and Raeburn House – formerly the Queen's Head public house -) would have joined the other houses in encircling a village green. These houses and the unaltered ford provide a glimpse of the character of the village two hundred years ago.

4.17 At the northeast end of the village the road to Silloth leads off between hedges and across fields, and approaching from that direction the village is not visible until just before the point of entry. To the southeast the road to Aspatria climbs and turns sharply uphill out of the valley floor

to reach the elevated land surrounding, and entering from

that direction the village is again invisible until the last moment. The steel handrails to either side of the road are 20th century but have an attractive functional simplicity.

4.18 Two views from the Aspatria – Silloth road are significant and contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area and its character. The first is eastwards up Westnewton Beck, where the valley narrows and its steep sides are lined with trees and thorn bushes, and the narrow strip pattern of the fields is still evident: this view reinforces the very rural character of the village. The second view is to the south west across the hillside leading down to the village, which is again divided by thorn hedges into narrow fields, confirming the age and agricultural origin of the village.

4.19 The Aspatria road also offers a view over much of Westnewton as a whole. The character of the village

here derives a considerable feeling of enclosure and intimacy from the sloping terrain which overlooks the village.



Road to Aspatria – original ford on left



Approach from northeast (Silloth)

5 DEFINING FEATURES

Setting and general character

- 5.1 Westnewton is discreetly located in a wide section of the valley floor of Westnewton Beck, with its buildings hidden from view until just before the point of entry. It gains a feeling of enclosure from the rising fields to each side, and from the constriction of the valley above and below.
- 5.2 It is a quiet village generously spread out and of domestic scale, its essentially agricultural origins and existing role made clear by the large number of previous and still operational farmsteads in the village, and by the hedged and cultivated fields surrounding it. Most other traditional buildings support or reflect this agricultural base.
- 5.3 Westnewton Beck contributes a great deal to the character of the village, flowing mostly alongside the main street between grassy banks. The bridges crossing the Beck to serve the properties are flat, simple, and guarded by simple functional handrails.
- 5.4 The main street curves gradually through the village to expose an unwinding series of views, and interest is added by the alternation of the stream from one side of the road to the other. Apart from a section at the western end of the Conservation Area (where high boundary walls run hard against the 'back of pavement' and conceal the buildings behind) the road is flanked by wide grassy margins, with buildings mostly unbounded or clearly visible within low-walled gardens, adding to the spacious appearance.
- 5.5 Spatially the village comprises one continuous space, with the Scheduled Monument standing rather offset and detached at the west end, and the old ford and its adjoining buildings somewhat closed off by the road embankment at the east.
- 5.6 The village retains many communal and recreational buildings (school,

church, village hall, inn etc) which enabled it to thrive as a self-sufficient rural community.



Typical farm workers' cottages



Brook View Cottage

Building forms

- 5.6 The traditional buildings are arranged very informally and sporadically along the public highways and include individual detached houses and terraces of three or four cottages. Most buildings have simple rectangular plans aligned parallel to the street, and apart from the hipped roofs of some higher status houses and farm outbuildings they have simple dual-pitched roofs falling to front and back. Extensions are simple lean-to's or minor offshoots at the rear.

There are no dormer windows or bay windows in the traditional buildings.

- 5.7 The notable exceptions to the above analysis are the three mid Victorian buildings erected by John Todd (the church, schoolhouse and almshouses), which are of much more complex and ornamental design and do not provide any precedent for new development.
- 5.8 Other notable exceptions are the numerous outbuildings to the farmsteads, which are usually of very simple form but are arranged totally in response to functional need.

Building materials

- 5.9 One old farm outbuilding at the east end of the village (at Chapel House Farm) may be of mud or clay construction, but the predominant walling material is red sandstone (- usually coursed rubble but ashlar in the case of the higher status buildings -) with painted or unpainted sandstone surrounds to windows, doorways and ventilation openings, and stone quoins at the wall corners.

Windows are painted timber, although in many cases sadly replaced by pvc of a non-traditional pattern. Oval ventilation holes in shaped stone blocks are a striking feature of the traditional barns.

- 5.10 Occasionally the front wall is rendered and painted, which may be an original feature or may have been applied later in an attempt to elevate the status of a building or to modernise it. Totally rendered or wet-dashed finishes (Westnewton House, Westnewton Grange and Yew Tree Farm) are unusual, and unfortunately have been repeated on several buildings during modernisation.



Church tower masonry



Typical sandstone outbuilding

5.11 Traditional roofs are finished in graduated Westmorland green slate, with stone ridges and hips, uniform Welsh blue slate appearing in the 19th century in new buildings or as replacements. Slating is nearly always carried over the gable ends, although Yew Tree Farm and Bridge end Farm have upstanding gable ends. Some prominently located farm buildings have unfortunately had their slate roofs replaced by modern profiled metal sheeting (Westnewton Hall and Bridge End Farm). Chimney stacks are of simple exposed or rendered brick: the ornate chimney stacks of Westnewton Grange are unique.

5.12 The exceptions again are the numerous farm outbuildings, which have grown in an ad hoc manner in the late 19th and 20th century and which are frequently of corrugated iron on structural frames. Whilst these may continue to be suitable for discreetly placed farm buildings they do not provide a precedent for any other new development.

Trees, gardens and open spaces

5.13 Mature trees are a major feature of the Conservation Area, either along field and property boundaries or as specimen trees in gardens and public open spaces. Boundary walls are of sandstone, often topped with shaped sandstone copings and with single upright stone gateposts of very simple design: where screening higher status houses (Westnewton House and Westnewton Grange) they can be of finely constructed ashlar, with more decorative gate piers and iron railings.

5.14 There are several cottage gardens prominent in the village which are attractive and contribute to its character (Yew Tree Farm, Bridge House, and Brookside next to the village hall). The churchyard, flanked on the north side by mature trees and rhododendron bushes, is an attractive quiet space.



Churchyard



Gateposts to Westnewton Grange

Summary

The **positive characteristics** of the village can be summarised as follows:

- its distinctly agricultural character, derived from the predominance of farm buildings and farm workers cottages.
- its close association with, and containment within, the cultivated fields of the valley sides, and in particular the strip fields created by the Enclosure Acts, which further confirms its agricultural character.
- the very specific topography, exploited by the historic road system, resulting in a settlement in a particularly wide and flat part of the valley bottom arranged along Westnewton Beck and its crossing points.
- the old ford over the beck at the east end of the village, which is a tangible reminder the previous appearance of the village.
- the site of 'Westnewton Castle', as the earliest known habitation and the origin of the settlement.

- the sinuous main street running through the village alongside the open stream, with very wide grass margins and open areas, giving a spacious feel.
- the combination of dwellings with gardens, paddocks and farmyards, resulting a generously spaced and informal arrangement of buildings.
- a significant number of high status farmhouses from the 17th to the 19th century, many of them being Listed.
- several mid – late 19th century public buildings of unusually high quality and distinctive character (St Matthews church, the school and school house, and St Matthews cottages) attributable to the benefactor John Todd.
- the survival of many communal buildings (church, school, village hall, inn etc) which underpinned the self-contained rural community.
- the use of red sandstone as the traditional building material, in conjunction with Westmorland green slate (later Welsh blue slate), confirming the very specific location of the village.

- a high proportion of traditional buildings retaining their original characteristics of simple rectangular forms, pitched roofs, chimneys, and rectangular window openings set vertically.

- the presence of many mature native trees or lines of trees at intervals within the village, particularly in the eastern part.

- a sense of enclosure, physical self-containment and rural tranquillity.

The **negative characteristics** of the village are few and can be summarised as:

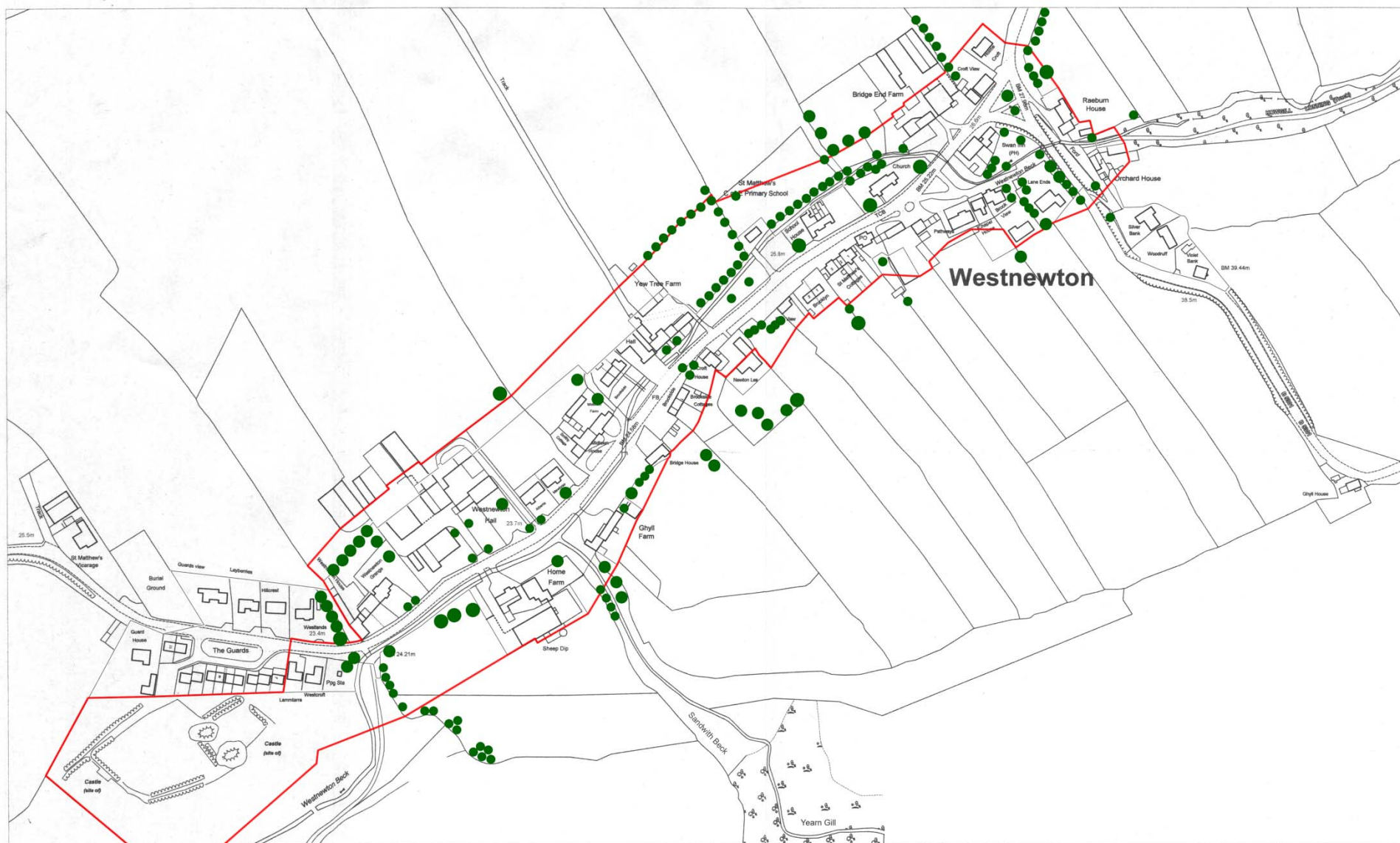
- the construction of some modern houses and bungalows which are out of character.
- the modernisation of many older houses by rendering of external walls or the insertion of pvc doors and windows.
- the re-roofing of farm outbuildings in metal sheeting rather than slates.

- the functional and over-economical design of many modern farm outbuildings.
- the village car park with its refuse collection bins.
- lack of maintenance of the stream banks, particularly at the eastern end.
- some large urban-style highway signs and obtrusive telegraph poles.

In the plan overleaf, the buildings coloured red are listed buildings, those coloured green are buildings which contribute positively the character and historic importance of the conservation area, and the buildings coloured blue are considered to be neutral to the character of the conservation area.



Plan showing values of buildings



1250
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Plan showing significant trees

6 SUGGESTED MANAGEMENT POLICIES

- 6.1 Some properties have relatively deep plots large enough to accommodate further buildings, with or without the addition of further land from the rear fields. However, such backland sites should only be used for purposes ancillary to the frontage property, and not used for 'tandem' development which would be alien to the character of the area.
- 6.2 The provision of new or replacement farm outbuildings needs to be considered carefully. There is a precedent for modern, functional buildings in this respect, in line with present day farming needs, but siting, massing, materials and colours need to be more carefully controlled than in the past.
- 6.3 Where traditional stone-built farm outbuildings have been re-roofed in modern metal sheeting every opportunity should be taken to replace these with traditional slate, especially those which are visually prominent.
- 6.4 The practice of finishing of natural stone walls with render, paint or roughcast should be stopped unless justified on a 'case by case' basis.
- 6.5 Many buildings have had their windows (and doors) replaced with modern upvc, usually of a non-traditional pattern. The use of upvc should be discouraged, and all replacement windows should continue the pattern of the original.
- 6.6 Any new building in the conservation area should reflect the character of the traditional buildings.
- 6.7 The banks of Westnewton Beck could benefit from better maintenance and regular cutting, especially around Bridge End Farm and the Swan Inn. If there is no one clearly responsible for doing this an agency should be determined, or the existing agency needs to be changed.
- 6.8 It would be beneficial if the recycling bins in the car park could be relocated more discreetly.
- 6.9 It would be beneficial for information to be provided at the west end of the village to explain the significance of the Scheduled Monument site.
- 6.10 Overhead telephone wires and telegraph posts are visually obtrusive in some areas and should be routed below ground or more discreetly if possible.
- 6.11 The provision and design of highway signs should be more sensitive to the context. The replacement of traditional cast iron sign posts with modern pressed metal should be resisted.
- 6.12 The character of the village is significantly shaped by the cultivated fields which form the valley sides and which provide the backdrop for views within the village and give a sense of enclosure. Although not within the Conservation Area they need to be managed with appropriate sensitivity.