

# Godmanchester (Earning Street) Conservation Area Character Statement

## 3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The town of Godmanchester lies immediately to the south of Huntingdon, on the opposite bank of the River Great Ouse. The two are linked by a medieval causeway and stone bridge.

3.2 Situated within the fertile Ouse valley, the town has its settled origins in Roman times. The moderately-sized Roman settlement became an outpost on the northerly route of Ermine Street from London to York, at its crossing with the Via Devena from Colchester to Chester.

3.3 This association with early transport infrastructure, derived from the crossing point of the river, sustained Godmanchester's continued prosperity and growth through the medieval period. The early phases of St. Mary's Church are indicative of the historic importance of the settlement and, in the 17th century, Godmanchester was referred to as 'a very great county Toune'.

3.4 The Roman town covered an area of 24 acres and was laid out in a formal pentagonal street pattern, which can still be traced today. Earning Street forms the eastern edge of this pentagonal plan, as shown on Map1. From time to time, relics of the Roman period have come to light, such as the south and west gates of the camp and a bath house. These indicate that the Roman occupation was lengthy, lasting from the 1st to the 4th century AD.

3.5 As is common with development following intensive Roman settlement, subsequent builders chose to build immediately outside the developed area. They selected 'greenfield' sites for ease of construction and quarried building materials from the obsolete Roman structures. Earning Street is a good example of this 'edge' development.

3.6 The development of Godmanchester has been moulded by its topography. To the east and west, the low-lying water meadows form a natural barrier. Post Street is the principal thoroughfare towards the river crossing and is the route of Ermine Street. A dense form of development has clustered here on the higher ground.



*View of Earning Street with Plantagenet House on the right c1949*

3.7 Godmanchester continued to prosper through the centuries and in 1212 King John gave it a charter which converted the town into a self-governing manor, which was an extremely rare form of local government. Godmanchester obtained the coveted status of Borough in 1604 under a Charter of James I.

3.8 Godmanchester was still a prosperous place between the 16th and 19th centuries, and a great deal of re-building took place in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, reflecting the newly-acquired Borough status. A number of important half-timbered structures from this period survive in the Earning Street Conservation Area.

3.9 The later 20th century has seen significant residential development around the fringes of the historic settlement. Nevertheless, it remains a small, pleasant town with a population of 6100. It has no 'high street', market place or concentrated shopping area.

3.10 Earning Street does not suffer from through traffic although it has long been the 'short-cut' between London Street and Cambridge Road. Once edging the farmland outside the Roman settlement, it has retained a more relaxed and spacious character although latterly suburban development has encroached. It remains as an area of intact, high quality streetscene, comprising fine buildings of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

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## 4. STREET ANALYSIS

4.1 The character of the Conservation Area derives from its variety of fine historic buildings, an intimate street scene and the contribution of boundary walls, outbuildings, green space and trees. Many periods of building are represented in this Conservation Area.

4.2 For the purposes of describing the character and appearance of the Godmanchester (Earning Street) Conservation Area, the area has been divided into three sub-areas: Cambridge Road; Earning Street and London Road. A Townscape Analysis is provided in Map 2 on page 6.

### Cambridge Road :

4.3 Cambridge Road is the principal thoroughfare linking Godmanchester with the A14. As such, it is a busy route. A significant amount of pedestrians from the residential areas in Tudor Road cross the road here. The area is therefore a focal point of activity.

4.4 Formerly on the edge of the town, the buildings along Cambridge Road tend to be set back in generous plots. The large gardens and tree cover give a green and spacious character. The boundary walls along the street edge protect the privacy of the dwellings and offer some protection from the bustle of the main road.

4.5 The junction of Cambridge Road and Earning Street is dominated by the White Hart public house. A part timber-framed and part brick structure. It stands detached and provides a vista



*The White Hart*

Stop to northerly views along Earning Street. It also plays a landmark role along Cambridge Road and Cambridge Street at an important intersection of minor roads. The pub has recently been extensively refurbished, but improvements to the car park boundaries would enhance its setting.

4.6 Nos. 3 and 4 Cambridge Road sit discreetly behind red brick boundary walls and mature tree cover. The walls provide very important definition to the streetscene. No. 3, a timber-framed structure, has authentic medieval origins and dates to the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its scale is small and the details simple. In contrast, No. 4, The Grove, is a large, Victorian mansion in an intentionally picturesque style. The exaggerated chimney stacks and ornamental bargeboards typify the playful design. It sits well back in a spacious, private plot, approached through gates and surrounded by mature trees.



*No 4 Cambridge Road*

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4.7 No. 5, Dial House is dated 1714 and is arguably the finest Georgian building in the Conservation Area, constructed of red brick with a sundial set on its front elevation between the regular sash windows. Although an important individual building, the overall quality of the streetscene eastwards from Dial House begins to weaken as the A14 flyover is approached.



*Dial House*

## **Earning Street :**

4.8 The character of Earning Street is defined largely by its landmark buildings: Tudor Farm, The Gables and Plantagenet House. Between these are buildings of modest scale and quality, simple outbuildings and boundary walls, all of which contribute to the area's overall character. As a rule, the historic buildings are set at the back of the pavement, maintaining the street's narrow character. The buildings are of 2 or 2 ½ storey height. Modern infill tends to be set back in the plot behind retained walls.

4.9 The entrance to Earning Street from Cambridge Road marks a change in character from the activity of the main routes to a quieter residential atmosphere. The grass verges help to soften the otherwise tarmaced surfaces associated with the junction and direct views into the narrow street.

4.10 No.1 Earning Street contributes to this softening character. Set back from the road behind a railing, hedge and mature trees, the dwelling has an outwardly Victorian appearance, a result of its dormers and bay windows, although it is actually a 17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed structure. The openness of the large garden is important to the character of this corner plot and distinguishes the edge of the Conservation Area from more conventional residential development in Tudor Road behind.



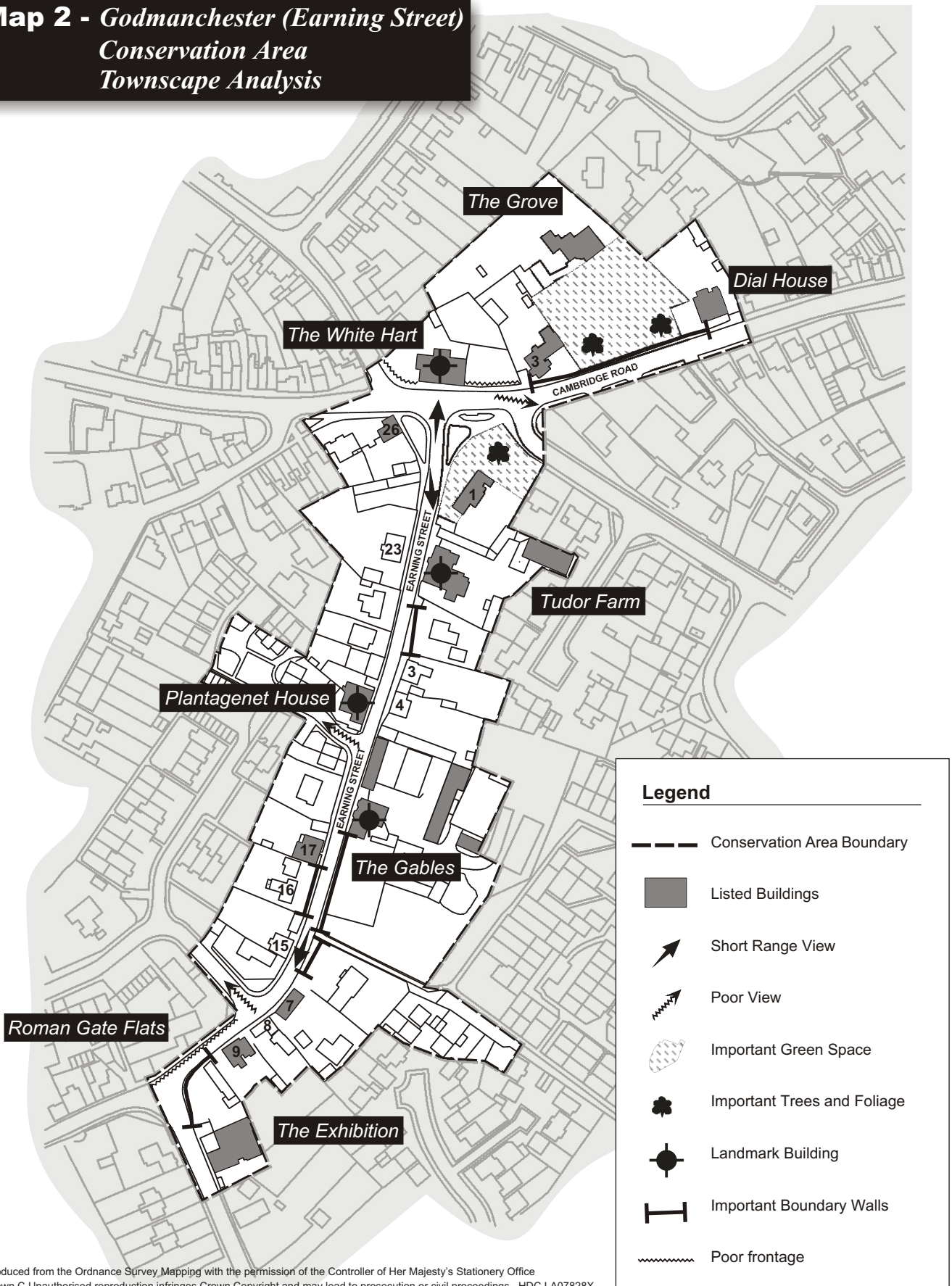
*No. 1 Earning Street*

4.11 No. 26, on the west side of the junction frames the entrance to Earning Street and provides a stop to westerly views along Cambridge Road. Dating from 1613, it is clearly an important historical building although the external grey render reduces its visual impact in the streetscene.



*No. 26 Earning Street*

**Map 2 - Godmanchester (Earning Street) Conservation Area Townscape Analysis**



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4.12 Within Earning Street, Tudor Farm is the most evident landmark building. Completed in 1603 and renovated in the early 1990s, it is described by Nikolaus Pevsner as “the best timber-framed house in Godmanchester” and is listed Grade II\*. Its exposed, close-studded timber-frame and earthy limewash dominate the streetscene and provide a rich and dramatic focus. Historic barns to the rear of Tudor Farm have been restored and converted to dwellings.



*Tudor Farm, Earning Street*

4.13 Opposite and adjacent to Tudor Farm are a mixture of single dwellings. With the exception of No. 24, which is a pretty Victorian house, these later infill buildings are of no architectural merit. Fortunately, these later additions to the street sit back in their plots and do not compete with Tudor Farm’s setting. The retention of the boundary wall in front of Janus House screens its otherwise negative impact and defines the street edge.

4.14 A pinchpoint is formed at the mid-point of Earning Street and the streetscene becomes narrow and enclosed. On the east side Nos. 3 and 4 form an attractive pair. No. 4 is a careful reconstruction of a fire-damaged Georgian dwelling in a rich red brick.



*Nos. 3 & 4 Earning Street*

4.15 The steeply pitched gables and tall chimneys of Plantagenet House, opposite, ensure its prominence in the street.



*Plantagenet House*

4.16 To the south of Plantagenet House, Sylton Close is an unfortunate break in the street’s enclosure. The design and detailing of the dwellings in this cul-de-sac is poor and there is scope for improvement of this area in the future.

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4.17 The Gables is the second major survivor of the original agricultural holdings which have developed on the fringes of the Roman settlement. Like Tudor Farm, it is a very fine timber frame of early 17th century date. Three barns within its grounds are separately listed but it is the barn adjacent to the street which reinforces the sites original use and character.



*The Gables*

4.18 South of The Gables, the street is enclosed by tall brick walls on both sides. On the east side, the walls and greenery contribute to the 'country lane' character of the street.



*Boundary wall to The Gables*

4.19 No. 17, almost opposite The Gables, is a mid-19th century villa in buff brick with an associated outbuilding. It's square, classical design offers a pleasant contrast with the busy, close-studded timber frame of The Gables.

4.20 In this part of the Conservation Area a number of outbuildings are important elements in the streetscene. In particular the outbuilding adjacent to No.15 minimises the visual impact of an otherwise unremarkable dwelling at No.16 and maintains the enclosure of the street.



*Outbuildings are important contributors to the streetscene*



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4.21 The gentle curve at the south end of Earning Street creates a very attractive streetscene and offers variety in an otherwise straight road. The outside of the curve is formed by Nos. 7, 8 and 9. These are modest examples of their period and help to establish the simpler character of this street.



*Nos. 7, 8 & 9 Earning Street*



*The Exhibition Public House*

### **London Road :**

4.22 Just before the junction with London Road, the entrance to Pipers Lane is another weak gap in the enclosure of the street. The wide verges and the scale and design of the Roman Gate flats, excluded from the Conservation Area, are not sympathetic to its setting.



*Roman Gate flats*

4.24 The western side of London Road, outside the Conservation Area, is dominated by modern development.

4.23 The junction with London Road is bounded on the east side by a high brick wall which extends to The Exhibition pub, a converted and extended dwelling of the late 18th century. Despite the significant additions, the original building remains legible and typifies the use of materials and modest detailing of red brick building in the Conservation Area.

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## 5. MATERIALS AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

5.1 The Conservation Area has a character derived from its most intense periods of building activity, the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Subsequent development has not greatly affected the character of the settlement contained within the Conservation Area boundary.

### Timber frame :

5.2 The timber-framed buildings in Earning Street are amongst the finest in the district, displaying close-studding and overhanging 'jetties'. The timber-framed elements within the streetscene are extremely important, reflecting the wealthy patronage of the yeomanry who built dwellings here in the late 16th and 17th centuries. These buildings are now roofed in the local Cambridge mix plain tile.



*The timber frame, plain tile and gabled dormers of Tudor Farm*



*Tudor Farm - early 17th century timber frame*

### Georgian brick :

5.3 The 18th century had the most profound impact on the architectural character of Godmanchester as a whole, although its influence in the Earning Street Conservation Area was more modest. With the exception of Dial House, 18th century development is restricted to a number of small scale dwellings. They are constructed in the deep red brick typical of the period, with neo-classical, symmetrical elevations and simple detailing of sashes, brick bands and door surrounds. On the roofs, the predominant materials are local Cambridge mix clay tile for dwellings, with pantiles used on ancillary buildings.



*18th century flush sash window*



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*Pegtiles*



*Pantiles*



*No.9 Earning Street - simpler 18th century brickwork & detailing*

## **Victorian brick :**

- 5.4 Building work of the 19th century is also modestly represented in the Conservation Area; however, the buff brick and slate buildings associated with the Victorian period contribute to the overall richness and variety of materials. The detailing of these dwellings remains neo-classical, retaining the sash windows of the Georgian period but often with fewer panes, coupled with good quality brick detailing.



*No.3 Earning Street - 19th century buff brick & slate*



*No.17 Earning Street - 4 panel Victorian door*

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## 8. ARCHAEOLOGY

8.1 The County Sites & Monuments Record contains 195 entries for Godmanchester, of which 104 relate to the Roman period.

### Pre-Roman :

8.2 During prehistoric periods, the alluvial islands and gravel terraces along the Ouse Valley were attractive for settlement and activity. Flint scatters dating from the Neolithic and Bronze Age are known from the area.

8.3 There was probably an Iron Age settlement predating the Roman town at Godmanchester, but little trace has been seen. The town lies on a logical and strategic fording point of the river, and during the Iron Age the Ouse may well have been the boundary between the Iceni and the Catuvellauni tribes.

### Roman :

8.4 During the Roman period a small yet significant town grew on the south bank of the Ouse at the crossing point of Ermine Street and the river. A fort was built here, and formed the focus for a road junction with the road to Cambridge. However, as the Roman army advanced further north the fort fell out of use and a civilian settlement replaced it.

8.5 The town was organised along a linear plan, with buildings mainly built out of timber. At least one catastrophic fire is known from 150AD. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD a *mansio* was built, and a temple to an unknown deity Abandinus. With the growth of the *cursus publicus* (Imperial message and post service) the location of the town on Ermine Street was of significance. The *mansio* served as an inn or way station, and that at Godmanchester is one of the largest known in Britain.

8.6 The Antonine Itinerary lists two settlements in this area, being *Durolipons* and *Durovigutum*. Conventional scholarship identifies the second as Godmanchester, although some have challenged this assumption.

8.7 Other buildings known in town include a bath house and a basilica. The town was walled in the later 3<sup>rd</sup> century in response to political uncertainty. Industrial remains around the town include pottery kilns and iron smelting, and numerous cemeteries are known. It is likely that Godmanchester formed the service centre at the core of a local landscape of villas, farms and hamlets.

8.8 The *mansio* and baths were demolished in the 360s AD as part of the general move away from the civic function of towns seen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. However occupation in the town continued into the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

8.9 The town grew and stagnated at various points in the Roman period, and it is difficult to draw limits on the extent of Roman activity here. There have been numerous archaeological interventions in the town and its hinterland, and certainly the entirety of the current town can be deemed of high archaeological potential and significance. The walled area of the later 3<sup>rd</sup> century encompassed approximately the area bounded by Cambridge Street, Earning Street and The Causeway, i.e. between the two Conservation Areas. However it should be noted that later Roman fortifications often only defended a core of the urban area and not its full extent.

### Anglo-Saxon :

8.10 The town eventually fell out of use in the Saxon period, and was succeeded by a substantial Early Saxon settlement in the area of Cardinal Distribution Park. There is a cemetery at Cow Lane from the same period. This Settlement fell out of use in the Middle Saxon period. During the Viking period, there is a tradition that there was a dock and settlement along the Causeway, but this has no archaeological support. The main settlement at this time appears to have been at Huntingdon, although the name 'Godmanchester' does derive from name 'Gudmund' and the word for fortification 'ceaster'.

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## **Medieval :**

- 8.11 At the time of the Domesday Survey, Godmanchester was a fairly large estate although still eclipsed by Huntingdon, and in 1212 it became a liberty, and the basis for a wealthy and large medieval and post-medieval town was established. It is likely that the medieval town core to the north of the Roman area was preceded by the Late Saxon village and manor, and was probably focused on the church of St Mary and also the moated site to the east. This is believed to be a holding of Merton Priory, and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 8.12 In summary, there are three distinct urban cores to Godmanchester, being the area of the Roman town, the Saxon settlement to the east and the medieval core to the north and west. Each has different characteristics and have contributed in a different way to the evolution of Godmanchester.

*For more information contact the Sites & Monuments Record at Cambridgeshire County Council.*

*Box ELH1108*

*Cambridgeshire County Council*

**Shire Hall**

*Cambridge*

*CB3 0AP*

*Tel: 01223 717312*

*Fax: 01223 362425*

*Email: CAO@cambridgeshi*

# *Godmanchester (Earning Street) Conservation Area Character Statement*

## **10. SUMMARY**

10.1 The preceding pages describe the essential characteristics of the Godmanchester Conservation Area. Certain key elements are fundamental to the character and appearance of the Area and can be summarised as follows:

- the narrow lane-like quality of the street
- The richness and variety of natural materials: timber-frame, red and buff brick, render, plain tile, pantile and slate.
- the coherence of traditional architectural detailing
- the lack of intrusive modern development.
- the contribution of boundary walls and outbuildings
- the presence of mature trees/greenery.

10.2 Protecting the special character and appearance of the Godmanchester (Earning Street) Conservation Area will be of benefit to residents, businesses and visitors alike now and in the future.

**For more detailed information and advice, please contact a member of Planning Services at Huntingdonshire District Council.**

**Tel: 01480 388424**

**Fax: 01480 388472**

**E-mail: [PlanningPolicy@huntsdc.gov.uk](mailto:PlanningPolicy@huntsdc.gov.uk)**