

ARTERIAL DEVELOPMENT

There are three main arterial roads running through Wansford fanning out in broadly north, east and westerly directions from the top of Bridge End by St. Mary's Church. These are Old North Road, Peterborough Road and Old Leicester Road. Yarwell Road is a lesser, but heavily used, highway joining the Old Leicester Road just to the west of the church. These major roads attracted a ribbon of development activity, largely during the second quarter of the twentieth century. In the second half of the twentieth century a number of cluster or small estate developments were constructed in the hinterland alongside, between and behind these main thoroughfares and the existing properties which already fronted them.

Old North Road (South of the A47)

Originally part of the Great North Road running between London and Edinburgh, the Old North Road starts at the main village cross roads. The 1902 Ordnance Survey map shows only a scattering of houses along the entire length of this road.

After the Great North Road by-passed Wansford in 1929, the road became a section of a crescent-shaped link between the old village and the new by-pass. The character of the road changed again when the A47 Peterborough to Leicester road was modified in 1964 to create a by-pass to the north and consequently cut the Old North Road in two. The part of Old North Road south of the A47 is characterised by a feeling of spaciousness with wide verges and stone walls or hedges forming the front boundary of most properties. On the west side of the road there is a sunken area that used to be a stone quarry, now long since disused, which now forms a feature of the front garden of numbers 23 and 24. There are quite a number of mature trees visible from the road and these help to contribute to the general atmosphere of low-density development.

When Old North Road ceased to be a major route, it became a very attractive place to live. During the second half of the twentieth century, four large detached houses were built on the west side of the road. Each of these properties had substantial gardens. The east side of the road was mostly market gardens at this stage but a single bungalow was built, now 30 Old North Road, accessed from Swanhill.



Mulberry House, Old North Road

Since the mid-twentieth century, the east side of the road has had a further six bungalows added while the large gardens on the west side have been divided up to provide sites for two houses facing on to the road and two large bungalows set behind the pre-war houses. In more recent years, two new roads have been built to the east producing the Black Swan Spinney and Swanhill developments. All of the properties built since 1929 have used buff coloured brick or artificial stone

with clay or concrete tiled roofs. These materials weather to blend in with the surroundings with the tiles growing moss and lichen so that the outline is softened.

The residents find the open feeling of the area attractive. No future development should threaten this. There is some scope for building in some of the large gardens but any such developments should be kept behind the existing building line. Certainly any new buildings that face Old North Road should be in a style and materials to blend with the existing properties. The Stamford Handmade bricks and clay tiles, which predominate, are still in production and have proved to be durable.

The frontage and gardens of 'The Paddocks', Old North Road – built by Thomas Ellington for his own occupation c1935 - include a set of pillars that formerly supported gates between the quire and the nave in Peterborough Cathedral and which were removed in 1928. These blend in well as they are made of local stone and enhance the character of the road.



Local builder Thomas Ellington built The Paddocks for his own occupation. The pillars were obtained as redundant from Peterborough Cathedral. A font complements the 'ecclesiastical' pillars as an unusual garden ornament.

Old North Road (North of the A47)

The section of Old North Road to the north of the A47 is somewhat isolated from the rest of the village, although there is a pedestrian subway.

Immediately to the north of the A47 is 'Swanhill House'; a substantial stone built house, of some age, with outbuildings. The house is set above the road with steps set into a retaining wall leading to the front door. There is also a driveway approach to the north side of the house. This is the only house that fronts on to the A1 north carriageway slip road, the rest of Old North Road being part of the original Great North Road but now being a *cul-de sac*. Close by the retaining wall is one of the Great North Road cast iron mile markers, which should be retained, even if the road layout is later further modified.



Swanhill House & Butterhill House, Old North Road (N)

Further north on the west side of the road are four detached houses and three pairs of semi-detached. They were built at various times after the Second World War and are notable for using Fletton bricks and dark grey roof tiles. They are all set well back from the road with fairly narrow frontages.

Roads radiating from Old North Road – South to North

Nene Close

Nene Close was built in 1950 by Barnack Rural District Council to provide affordable housing for rent to local residents. Those of the properties still in Council ownership now belong to the Peterborough City Council. There are five pairs of semi-detached houses, two terraces each of four houses, one terrace of six houses and a terrace of three bungalows; making twenty-seven properties in all. There are two detached, interfacing garage blocks each of six units accessed from the head of the cul-de-sac. These properties were built to a high standard, constructed of brick under tiled roofs. Both internal and external wall skins are brick, rather than having internal block-built walls - as is commonly the practice today - and the original furniture on the contemporary metal windows, where existing, is solid brass. The choice of brick is exemplary being of high quality with the matt, mottled colour blending comfortably with the local setting.



Nene Close and its Green with decorative pump and park bench.

To the east side of the Close is a large, open Green area extending as far as Peterborough Road. This provides an excellent recreation area for residents and an unsupervised play area for children. Development of the green for residential purposes was successfully resisted. There can be no doubt that loss of this open area – arguably the only ‘real’ village green in Wansford – would not only have proved a devastating loss of amenity to the Close itself, but to the village as a whole.

Swanhill

A private development built on the site of the old Swanhill Nurseries in the 1980s, this *cul-de-sac* comprises nine houses and two bungalows. All are constructed of brick under tiled roofs with some of the houses built of a deeply hued reddish brick ensuring a certain visibility. A most pleasant feature of this road is a planted, open area which accentuates the open plan front gardens, ensuring soft contour lines and a pleasantly ‘leafy’ feel to this attractive development as gardens, trees and bushes gently mature. The only plot where future development of any consequence might possibly be considered at a future date is at 30, Old North Road, which enjoys access directly onto Swanhill. Otherwise, other than ancillary features such as conservatories and, possibly, limited loft conversion, there would appear to be little scope for additional building. It is important that the open, ‘leafy’ feel already cited should be maintained and any future planting should preferably favour native, broad leaf species rather than the ubiquitous fir.



Detached house, Swanhill

Black Swan Spinney

A cul-de-sac of five houses and eight bungalows features the distinctive, open plan front gardens which have become such a successful signature characteristic of private developments in Wansford. Screening afforded by mature trees successfully achieves the sylvan effect conjured by the road name. In the interests of road noise abatement, the use of some non-native evergreen species to screen houses backing onto the A47 would appear almost inevitable. It is significant, and to the great credit of residents and the upkeep of their immediate environment that, other than traffic rumble, one feels far-removed from the major trunk a matter of metres to the north.



Bungalow and house styles, Black Swan Spinney

Thackers Close

A road branching west from Old North Road to the north of the A47 forms Thackers Close; a group of seven houses built in 1969. These are laid out with quite spacious gardens. The construction materials echo the muted browns of the southern section of Old North Road.

The east side of this part of Old North Road is overgrown, including large trees, presumably left in an attempt to screen out the noise of the A1. The upkeep of this area of woodland could be improved without reducing the sound attenuation it clearly provides.



4, Thackers Close

Peterborough Road

The Little Chef outlet on the corner of Peterborough Road and the A1 northbound carriageway was built in 1932. It opened as The Wansford Knight, the fifth roadhouse of the 'Knights of the Road' chain. In 1936 it changed hands and became 'The New Mermaid' in place of the centuries-old Mermaid Inn, which stood facing down Bridge End from the corner of the Old North Road and which was demolished to widen the road at that junction.

In its original design and execution, the building was rooted conceptually in the innovative, continental *Bauhaus* influenced style then popular; with flat roofs, horizontal canopies, curved metal windows and painted, white rendering. It is believed to have been one of only five commercial properties of similar design built in the U.K.



The Little Chef, Wansford

This building was declined listing due to the removal of the largest, curved metal-framed window and its replacement with another more in keeping with the Little Chef's corporate house-style. The plethora of signs both on the building and adjacent has been the subject of much local criticism.

Another, more recent, Swanhill House in Wansford was formerly the local Police station until that local utility was withdrawn when the property was sold into private ownership. Both Swanhill House and its neighbour, no: 6, are detached, local brick built houses under tiled roofs.

The White House is a two-storey house with white painted, rendered walls and a slate roof. The main building has been modified and added to over the years. It was built in the early 1930s and enjoys a lawn area running down to the river. Pierhead is a ranch-style property with an attractive, integral decking feature facing the river. Of brick and tile construction on two floors, it was built during the late 1960s and thoughtfully set into the contour slope above the riverbank.

The Moorings and The Firs are a pair of detached properties sharing joint access to Peterborough Road.



The Moorings, Peterborough Road

Built in the late 1980s, they are of reconstituted stonework under tiled roofs with detached garages. Both rear gardens run down to the river's edge.

Old Leicester Road

On the south side there are 15 dwellings of which 9 are houses, 2 are chalet bungalows and 4 are bungalows. All are detached. All appear to have been built in the late 60s through to early 70s and most are constructed in brick under concrete tile roofs. The variation of brick and brick colour employed is considerable.

At the Yarwell Road junction the street commences with an old stone barn with Collyweston tile roof now converted to a double garage. An old stone wall, formerly a field boundary wall, continues almost the entire length of the road, broken only to provide individual vehicular access to each of the houses behind. Each dwelling is set well back from the road. These houses all back onto open countryside, which can be glimpsed through the spaces between dwellings.

Immediately behind the stone wall there are substantial tree and shrub screens which afford these dwellings considerable privacy.

Between the stone wall and the road is a wide verge, which sweeps its way up to the open countryside at the western extremity of the road. There is no footpath. The street view is, arguably, marred by a number of telegraph poles and associated cables strung overhead.



The Stables, Old Leicester Road, today and before conversion



photos: Leonard Du Pisanie



South side of Old Leicester Road. Old field boundary wall in foreground.

These dwellings are all 4 and 5 bedroomed and have gardens from just over a quarter acre to about one acre each in size. Many have steeply sloping roofs. Only the final two dwellings at the extreme western end of the road appear close-built to each other and lack the space enjoyed by the other properties. These latter two were constructed of reconstituted stone during the mid to late 1990s. Beyond these dwellings is a secure compound behind chain-link fencing from which large, static propane gas cylinders supply gas to nearby properties in the village. There is no mains gas supply available anywhere in Wansford.

The large field beyond the gas compound is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In the neck of the fork in the road where the King's Cliffe Road branches from the Old Leicester Road, is the Old Pump House and home to the Paws and Claws Cattery. The original facility was built on about two thirds of an acre of land purchased from Earl Fitzwilliam by Stibbington District Council in 1915 to house a spring-sourced mechanical pump and water storage tank to supply piped water to the community on the southern side of Wansford Bridge alone. After the introduction of a mains water supply to the village, the redundant pump house was extensively redeveloped, extended and converted into a private residence.

On the north side, there are 13 dwellings plus those in The Stables. All are markedly different in design to those on the south side. From the east, after "Greystoke" which is in the conservation area, the houses start with the Stables. This is an L shape of linked cottages in old stone with attractively varied roof and gable features. On the site of what was a working stable until about 1980, they form a courtyard with the third side comprising a long garage block. At the centre is a mature willow tree around which the considerable circular drive area is gravelled. Vehicular and pedestrian access is gained through an opening in the original, old stone wall which effectively screens these dwellings from the road. No. 4 is a large detached house on a sizeable plot encompassed by a public footpath, which links with the Old North Road. It is an unsurfaced lane with a natural, stone wall on the western boundary and a high hedge screening no. 4 to the east. From thereon begins a run of 4 pairs of semi-detached houses built in 1935 by Thomas Ellington in varying brick under tiled roofs. These four pairs of semi-detached houses do not have the tree and shrub screens of the properties they overlook opposite. Behind these dwellings a small estate of five individually designed, detached houses with garages commenced construction in early 2003 on the site of an old nursery. This new development is accessed through a break in the stone wall between no. 8 and the lane mentioned above.

There follow three, detached, brick built houses that enjoy a degree of privacy behind hedge and tree screening. Then follows the boundary wall of the large garden of 2 Robins Field which runs behind the entire length of all the houses on the south side of Robins Field and fronts onto the Old Leicester Road eastwards from the Robins Field turning to 28, Old Leicester Road.

This garden is screened by linear, deciduous tree planting and an excellent high stone wall built recently in place of a section of the lower, old field wall that provides a continuous boundary the entire length of the road. On the far side of the Robins Field junction, 1 Robins Field, enjoys the unfenced open plan concept to the front and side gardens that is a marked feature of this latter road. Beyond to the west is a large open field, at present a "set-aside" field, which provides open views to the rear of 1,3,5 and 7 Robins Field and 1 and 2 Robins Wood. The continuation of the Old Leicester Road from the Robins Field junction follows the southern, tree lined boundary of the "set aside" field and along which there is an unsurfaced footpath as far as the King's Cliffe junction. The "set aside" field is outside the village envelope for development purposes.



Old Leicester Road, north side, semi-detached houses.

The natural width of the Old Leicester Road is accentuated by the often broad, grassed verges on the southern side and the marked distance of the building line from front boundary walls. The narrower verges on either side of the footpath on the northern side complement this feeling. Other than the proposed development already noted to the rear of 8, Old North Road, the only other land bank of consequence is the grounds of 2, Robins Field with the significant frontage onto Old Leicester Road.

Roads radiating from Old Leicester Road

Robins Field & Robins Wood

Robins Field is a *cul-de-sac* of 12 houses and four bungalows, all detached, built in the early to mid-1970s on the site of a former orchard and nursery. Some are based on Scandinavian designs, enjoying the then novel benefit of standard secondary glazing - a number have subsequently upgraded to double glazing - enhanced insulation and, in most cases, integral double garages.

White, aluminium cladding to some upper storeys provide the distinctive 'Scandinavian look' to the development. The front gardens in the *cul de sac* are open plan without walls or fences to demark individual boundaries: a feature protected by covenant that undoubtedly enhances the appearance and outlook of the whole area.



Scandinavian-style houses with aluminium cladding, Robins Field

Space of a road-width was retained on the north side at the head of the *cul-de-sac* to enable a 'loop' road to be constructed when the adjoining Robins Wood development was later built between Robins Field and the A47 in 1978. However, the insertion of an additional property in Robins Wood removed that potential so that road, too, became a *cul-de-sac*.

After planning permission was denied for the erection of a studio-type property, this redundant ribbon of land in Robins Field was subsequently purchased by the owner of no. 21 and incorporated into its adjacent garden. A main propane gas pipeline runs the length of this plot.



Detached, brick built house with double integral garage, Robins Field

Robins Wood comprises 16 detached houses of which one, Timbers, a timber house, existed before this later development and formerly accessed the Old North Road via a long driveway. Principally built of brick under tiled roofs, the incorporation of four houses of Scandinavian appearance with wood-clad upper elevations, plus most houses featuring open plan front gardens, ensure a harmonious, continuity with the earlier properties in Robins Field: from which Robins Wood shares common access to the Old Leicester Road. The north side backing directly onto the A47 inhibits the possibility of additional development.



Scandinavian-style house with timber-clad front balcony, Robin's Wood