

**RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COOMBE ABBEY  
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**



**June 2010**

## CONTENTS

		Page
1	Introduction	3
2	Location and context	5
3	General character and form	6
4	Landscape setting	7
5	Historic development	8
6	Archaeology	11
7	Architecture, buildings and features	14
8	Detailed Architectural Assessment	15
	Area 1: The Historic Core	15
	Area 2: The Outer Areas	19
9	Contribution of unlisted buildings	20
10	Street furniture	21
11	Key views and vistas	22
12	Existence of any neutral areas	22
13	Conclusions	22
14	Preservation and enhancement	23
15	Appendices	25

## **INTRODUCTION**

Coombe Abbey Conservation Area comprises the abbey as the central focus with subservient buildings to the rear. The designation is landscape dominated with the formal avenue leading up to the abbey and evidence of the three phases of landscaping remaining. The abbey is now a hotel and much of the grounds a country park. The built form is varied and limited to groups of buildings; the central core, the farm buildings to the east and former menagerie to the west. Isolated buildings such as the western gatehouse aid the understanding of the area. Water is a key feature with the medieval character moat around the abbey leading to the lake to the west.

Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A Conservation Area is defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as an 'area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Section 69 of the Act places a duty on the Local Authority to review its Conservation Areas, Section 71 requires the Authority to formulate and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. Coombe Abbey is one of 19 Conservation Areas in the Borough.

Local Authorities have a duty to identify, designate, preserve and enhance Conservation Areas within their administrative area. The aim in a Conservation Area is to preserve or enhance not merely individual buildings but all those elements, which may include minor buildings, trees, open spaces, walls, paving, and materials etc., which together make up a familiar and attractive local scene. The relationship between buildings and spaces within Conservation Areas creates a unique environment, which provides a sense of identity and amenity for residents and an irreplaceable part of our local, regional and national heritage.

The positive identification of areas for designation helps focus attention on its qualities and encourages a sensitive approach to any proposed development. The Local Planning Authority will exercise particular care to ensure that change, where it occurs, will preserve or enhance the character of an area. The designation of a Conservation Area ensures the quality of design and context are considerations in determining Planning Applications.

There are different planning controls in Conservation Areas and anyone proposing development should seek advice from Rugby Borough Planning Authority. In addition to planning controls that govern alterations and extensions Planning Permission would be required for the following development in Conservation Areas:

- The cladding of any part of the exterior of a dwelling with stone, artificial stone, pebble dash, render, timber, plastic or tiles;
- An extension extending beyond a wall forming a side elevation of the original dwelling;
- An extension having more than one storey and extending beyond the rear wall of the original dwelling;
- Any enlargement of a dwelling consisting of an addition or alteration to the roof;
- The provision of a building, container, enclosure, swimming or other pool where it would be situated on land between a wall forming a side elevation and the boundary of the dwelling or to the front of the original principle elevation;

- The installation, alteration or replacement of a chimney, flue or soil and vent pipe which fronts a highway and forms either the principal elevation or a side elevation of a dwelling;
- The installation, alteration or replacement of a microwave antenna on a dwelling, or within the grounds, on a chimney, wall or roof slope facing onto and visible from a highway or on a building greater than 15 metres in height.

In addition Conservation Area consent is required where in excess of 115 cubic metres of buildings are to be demolished. Conservation Area designation also protects trees within the boundary by requiring owners to give the Local Planning Authority six weeks notice of their intention to carry out any work on trees that have a trunk in excess of 75mm in diameter measured 1.5 metres from the ground.

All Planning Applications for development which would affect the character of a Conservation Area must be advertised in the local press and site notices posted.

This document is an appraisal of Coombe Abbey Conservation Area. It is based on guidelines issued by English Heritage, the Government's advisor on the historic built environment, and has been prepared by Rugby Borough Council. The principal objectives of the appraisal are to:

- define and record the special interest of Coombe Abbey Conservation Area to ensure there is full understanding of what is worthy of preservation;
- increase public awareness of the aims and objectives of Conservation Area designation and stimulate their involvement in the protection of its character and to inform decisions made by Rugby Borough Council, the Parish Council and local residents;
- reassess current boundaries to make certain that they accurately reflect what is now perceived to be of special interest and that they are readable on the ground;
- assess the action that may be necessary to safeguard this special interest and put forward proposals for their enhancement.

It is however not intended to be wholly comprehensive in its content and failure to mention any particular building, feature or space should not be assumed to imply that they are of no interest. This assessment should be read in conjunction with the Rugby Borough Local Plan 2006 saved policies, submission Core Strategy, and national policy guidance particularly Planning Policy Statement 5 Planning for the Historic Environment and its practice guide. These documents provide more detailed information on local and national policy relating to Conservation Areas.

## MAP 1 CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION



### LOCATION AND CONTEXT

Coombe Abbey is located some nine miles north-west of Rugby and some two miles east of Coventry. The site comprises formal gardens, informal pleasure grounds, walled gardens, parkland, lakes and avenues. The site is bordered by the A427 to the south which runs between Brinklow and Coventry. Two avenues run beyond to the south and south-west of the house. On the remaining boundaries the site joins agricultural land.

The surrounding land on the north, south and west of the house is relatively level. The Smite Brook runs from north-east to south-west through a valley to the north and west of the house. This was dammed in the late eighteenth century to form a lake. On the eastern side of the house the ground level rises.

Views out of the site are generally rural. To the north and north-east views are of the surrounding agricultural land. To the south the views are across the A427 towards Birchley Wood, The Grove and New Close Wood. Through this area the two avenues extend south towards Brandon.

Landscape Character Assessments categorise the English landscape. Coombe Abbey Park is within the designated Regional Character Area 1 Dunsmore. The Dunsmore Parkland comprises an enclosed estate landscape with a well wooded character and woodland edges, parkland and tree belts. Coombe comprises eighteenth and nineteenth century parks.

## Photograph 2 Landscaped setting



### **GENERAL CHARACTER AND FORM**

Coombe Abbey lies to the east of a major fault line in the underlying rocks dividing the coal bearing Carboniferous strata from the shale and sandstone layers of the Polesworth Formation. The geology was covered in the Glacial and Post Glacial periods by layers of sand, gravel and clay. The designation comprises layers of clay, mudstone and gravel above the original shale and sandstone and the impact of brooks and rivers have modified these layers.

The Conservation Area comprises different periods of landscaping and groups of buildings. The central core comprises the abbey as the prominent feature with the landscaping, in the form of the tree avenue, leading to the primary building. Landscaping around the abbey prevents views escaping and ensures the dominance of the building.

To the rear the subservient buildings comprise a mix of materials. The tennis building and stables are of contrasting red brick and of a smaller scale than the abbey. Although the cottages are of stone they do not compete with the abbey given the location and more limited scale.

The grounds provide historic evidence of the different phases of landscaping. Although no period has been fully maintained sufficient remains allows clear understanding of the evolution. The wider countryside setting is at times read in conjunction with the land within the Conservation Area; at other times the impact of the surrounding land is limited by the enclosure created by planting.

The key landscape characteristics include formal avenues, undeveloped fields, pleasure grounds and woodland. To the west the area is dominated by the lake which guides the eye away from the abbey into the surrounding land. At the western point the lake

encircles a further group of buildings which include the former menagerie and outbuildings.

The other main collection of buildings is found on the eastern side. The walled garden is linked to a farmhouse and a group of more modern agricultural structures. Other buildings tend to be isolated and include the boathouse and visitor building. The latter is the clearest illustration of the country park use, along with the car park to the east and playground to the west of the avenue.

### **Photograph 3 The formal garden**



### **LANDSCAPE SETTING, GREEN AND OPEN SPACES AND TREES**

The current Coombe Abbey Park is a result of three landscaping phases. The first phase of landscaping took place from the mid sixteenth century to the late seventeenth century and comprised development of the formal gardens adjacent to the abbey and extended into the deer park. The second phase saw the creation of a landscape park in the mid to late eighteenth century which removed the majority of the formal landscape. The last phase dates from the late nineteenth century which saw the reintroduction of the formal gardens close to the main house. The importance of the grounds is that they reflect elements of each of these phases.

Landscaping plays a major role in the Conservation Area. The designation is set within countryside which provides a rural approach. Although Coventry is in close proximity along the western boundary it does not impact upon the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Fields border the Conservation Area on all sides.

The connection between the Conservation Area and surrounding land remains. For example the remnants of the avenue, to the south entrance beyond the designation, illustrates the former scale of the unit. The landscaped grounds created by Capability Brown remains sufficiently to appreciate the wider landscape and to allow the surrounding land to be read as a continuation of the designation.

Within the designation there are a number of different landscape elements. The approach from the south is framed by the Lime and Horse Chestnut avenue which provides a sense of enclosure and leads the eye to the abbey. This is strengthened by the Yew hedge surrounding the courtyard. Wider views are limited by the Yew, Cypress, Cedar and Willow to the west and the Oak, Yew, Copper Beech and Cedar to the east. This sense of enclosure contrasts with the open fields to the east of the approach.

The formal garden to the west provides the foreground to the abbey. The remnants of the pleasure grounds result in sparser tree planting with grassland and to the north a greater tree covering is provided by the woodland. The landscape controls views to and from the abbey.

The majority of the large trees within the designation date from the 1850's. Original planting patterns remain discernible; however, twentieth century planting has resulted in a more mixed character landscape with the later planting not based upon historic precedent.

**Photograph 4 The lake providing the foreground to the abbey**



**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The site housed a Cistercian monastery that was founded in 1150. The monks of Coombe were sheep farmers with their area stretching over the villages of Upper and Lower Smite. During the fifteenth century substantial works to the abbey took place. However, the abbey was dissolved in 1539 and the site and buildings were granted to Mary, Duchess of Somerset and Richmond. They then passed to John Dudley, later Duke of Northumberland, and in 1557 to Robert Kelway, Surveyor of the Court of Wards and Liveries. He sublet the site to Sir William Wigston, a Leicester merchant.

In 1581 Robert Kelway died and left the estate to his daughter Elizabeth and her husband John Harrington. They lived at Coombe and were responsible for converting it into a substantial country house which by the 1660's had 51 hearths. The buildings

were arranged around three sides of the former monastic cloister with the south side left open by the removal of the church. There was a timber framed gallery stretching over the three cloister walks surmounted by rows of gables and lit by windows with small pediments. The hall was on the north side flanked to the east by a great chamber and to the west by a kitchen, the main residential quarters faced west and on the east side there was a gallery.

In 1603 John Harrington became a lord and was entrusted with the guardianship of James I's daughter, Princess Elizabeth. She lived at Coombe until 1608 before moving to Kew and during those 5 years substantial changes were made to the house. The south fronts of the east and west wings were remodelled in stone, with large mullioned and transomed windows and ogee shaped gables and a fan vaulted porch with carving was added to the eastern side of the east range. This led down from the gallery in the east range to a walled garden which was surrounded by a raised walkway (the outer wall survives).

The excess of Princess Elizabeth's household left Harrington impoverished and he died in 1613. His son and heir died in 1614 leaving the house to his sister, Lucy, Countess of Bedford. She was a leading member of James's court. She sold the house in 1622 to Elizabeth, widow of Sir William Craven, a former mayor of London. Craven left money which was used to build up a substantial group of estates. By fighting on the Protestant side in the early years of the Thirty Years War he gained the favour of Charles I who made him Lord Craven and protector of Princess Elizabeth.

Lord Craven's estates were confiscated by Parliament after the civil war but the house was not demolished. Craven subsequently regained his lands and after the Restoration he was given an earldom by Charles II. Coombe Abbey became the residence of Craven's godson Sir Issac Gibson who acted as his agent and built an unpretentious gabled extension of stone at the southern end of the west range between 1667 and 1669. Gibson died and Coombe became home of Lord Craven's cousin and prospective heir Sir William Craven and in 1682-9 Lord Craven financed another major rebuilding of the house.

The work comprised the building of a new west range and rebuilding of part of the north range containing the hall. The architect was William Winde, another of Craven's godsons. Winde was responsible for assembling a team of craftsman including the master carpenter Jonathan Wilcox, the sculptor Edward Pierce and the plasterer Edward Gouge.

The new west range of local grey sandstone, was two storeys with a hipped roof and tall chimneys. It was originally intended to have a symmetrical elevation of 15 bays with a recessed centre surmounted by a pediment and projecting pavilions at each end. However, Sir Isacc Gibson's recently built south wing survived and this side of the house has had a lopsided appearance ever since.

The new west wing was completed in 1684 and then the western end of the north front was refaced. Work had finished by 1689 but operations in the garden continued. Kip's drawing of around 1707 shows an ornamental parterre stretching south from the Jacobean garden to the east of the house on the site of the present car park. This was in the style of George London and may have been designed by him. A public road from

Coventry to Brinklow ran close to the north front and to the west of the house there were stables and outbuildings.

Lord Craven died in 1697 and the Coombe estate passed to Sir William's son who was granted the title of Lord Craven. There were no further alterations at the abbey until the 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Craven commissioned Capability Brown to landscape the park in 1771-7. This involved clearing away the late seventeenth century formal gardens creating lawns which swept up to the front of the house, closing the road to the north and damming Smite Stream to create a 77 acre lake in the park to the west. A kitchen garden surrounded by a ha-ha was created to the north east of the house, a stable block built to the north along with a pedimented building used as a brewhouse and new drives were constructed to maximise the improved landscape. A west lodge was built in the form of a triumphal arch and an east lodge in the Gothic style. Lord Craven created a menagerie overlooked by a building with an octagonal tower surmounted by a dome, while to the south of the house, to the right of the entrance to the present drive, there was a castellated dog kennel, since demolished. The main alteration to the house was the addition of a third storey to the courtyard side of the north range.

Lord Craven died in 1791 and his son who was made earl in 1801 built an indoor tennis court to the north of the house around 1810. In 1861-2 William Eden Nesfield produced a scheme for rebuilding the house again. The final project, also worked on by Richard Norman Shaw, involved demolishing the whole of sixteenth century east wing with the exception of the twelfth century chapter house doorway and replacing with a larger block built of red sandstone. Some alterations were carried out to the outbuildings to the north, facing the north side of the eighteenth century stable block with tile hanging and adding a clock turret. Work began in 1863 and was still unfinished when Lord Craven died in 1866.

Nesfield's east wing dwarfed earlier buildings and gave the south front an unbalanced appearance. There was an impressive elevation to the east overlooking a recreated formal garden with an arcade on the ground floor and ranks of mullioned and transomed windows surmounted by steep pitched roofs of French character. The new buildings derived much of its effect from a moat dug along the south front of the new house with a boathouse at basement level. The moat continued across to the west front where it drained into a rectangular canal which formed part of the centre piece of a formal garden designed by W A Nesfield. The new garden was laid out with parterres and new pleasure grounds to the north of the house with the planting of 73 Wellingtonias and the building of green houses in the kitchen gardens carried out by William Miller.

By the early twentieth century there was a steep decline. The estate was sold in 1923 to John Gray, a Coventry builder. He demolished Nesfield's east wing and ruined the appearance of the west wing by lowering the roof and demolishing the north pavilion. In 1952 it was leased to the General Electric Company who ran it as a residential hostel. Coventry City Council bought the abbey after Gray's death in 1964. They leased it to a company putting on medieval banquets in the north parlour.

However, by the 1970's the building stood empty and derelict. Parts of the structure became dangerous, ceilings collapsed and dry rot spread to many areas. Between 1976 and 1985 several works of restoration were carried out involving external masonry and roof repairs to various parts of the building, principally the south-west wing.

In 1985 when the west range was reported to be in a serious state of dilapidation a phased programme of major restoration was announced. In the first phase the pedimented west facade was restored and an entirely new roof structure with lead and slate coverings was built over the west range.

The grounds have however since experienced a new lease of life as a country park with the renovated house as the centre point. Repairs, alterations and new buildings have been sympathetically carried out.

### **Photograph 5 Views to the abbey framed by the landscaping**



### **ARCHAEOLOGY**

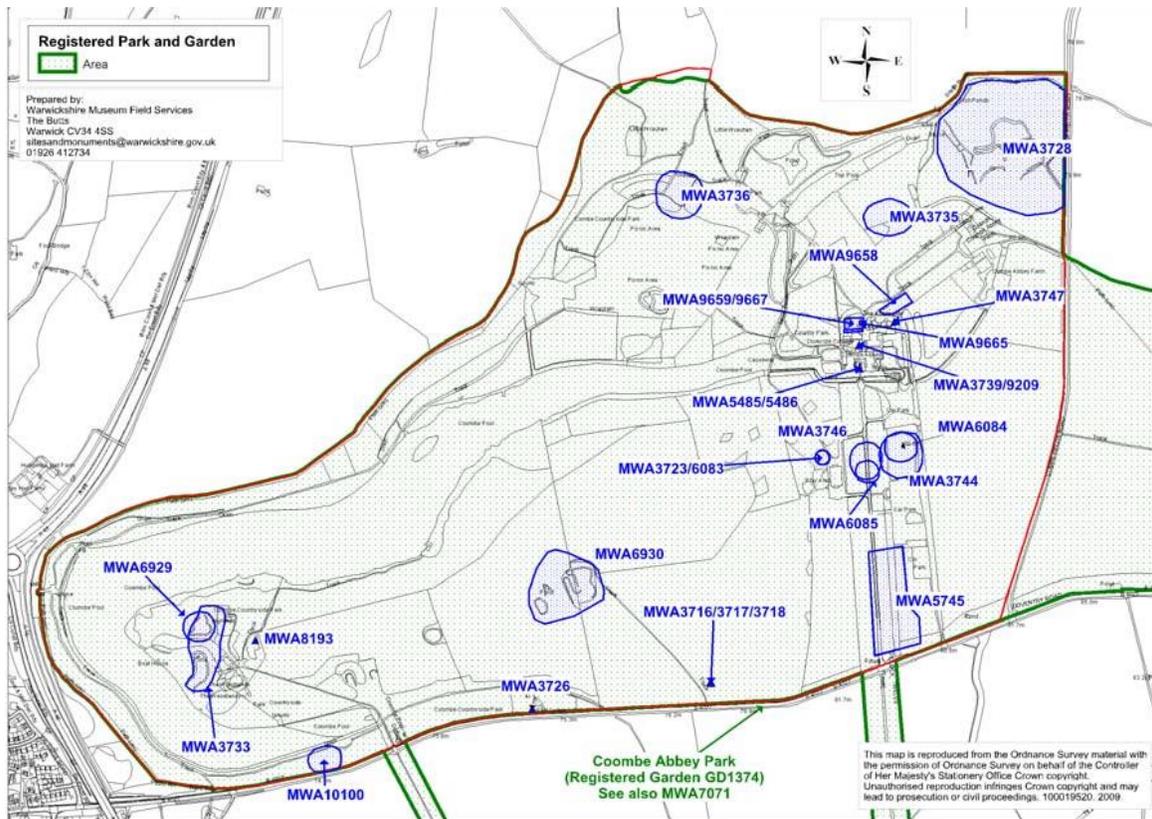
A Cistercian Abbey was founded in 1150. Elements of the claustral buildings were incorporated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Country House which stands on the site, a Grade 1 Listed Building. Coombe Abbey Country House was altered during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Excavation over the last 20 years has revealed a complex of deeply stratified archaeological deposits, with survival of material from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Fishponds, potentially dating to the earliest use of the site, survive as earthworks in the wider environs of Coombe Abbey.

The whole Conservation Area lies within the Registered Park and Garden of Coombe Abbey Park. This parkland contains a number of features associated with the landscaping of the park in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, with structures by Henry Holland. Formal gardens were also laid out in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century by William Andrews Nessfield and William Miller.

Lancelot Brown's work includes the gate lodges, the menagerie, the lake, a boat house and the kennels. He was also responsible for the terraces and Italianate parterres which

were restored in the 1860s. Nessfield's work includes the Dovecote in the stable block and the moat in front of the house (excavated partly on the site of the former church).

A number of earth mounds or tumuli have been recorded within the parkland. Some of these have been interpreted as Bronze Age barrows, although it is possible that they may actually relate to the post-medieval landscaping of the gardens, as possible locations for garden gazebos. A number of chance finds have been made within the grounds of including Roman and Medieval pottery.



## MAP 2A ARCHAEOLOGY RECORDED ON THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

### HER Records

MWA3739	Combe Abbey
MWA5486	Moat at Combe Abbey
MWA3726	West Lodge E of Combe Pool, Combe Abbey
MWA3747	Dovecote in the stable block, Combe Abbey
MWA3744	Possible Bronze Age round barrow
MWA3746	Possible Bronze Age round barrow, Combe Fields
MWA3723	Mound S of Combe Abbey
MWA5746	Dog Kennels Site at Combe Abbey
MWA5745	Site of Dog Kennels at Coombe Abbey
MWA6083	Mound S of Combe Abbey
MWA6084	Post Medieval earthwork gazebo
MWA6085	Post Medieval earthwork gazebo

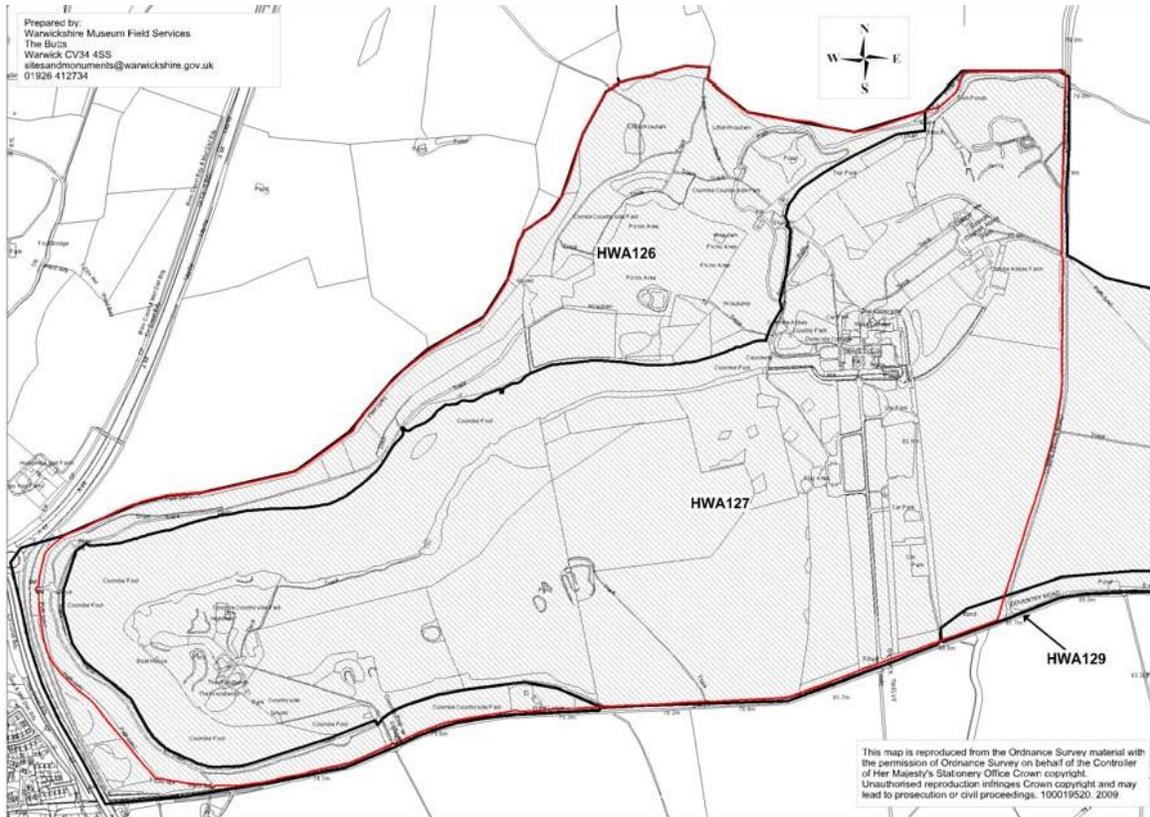
MWA6930	Site of Clay Pits at Combe Fields Deer Park
MWA6929	Site of Gravel Pit NW of The Woodlands
MWA3733	Quarry within Combe Abbey Deer Park
MWA3736	Quarry, Little Wrautam, W of Combe Abbey
MWA3735	Site of Dovecote to N of Combe Abbey
MWA3728	Fishponds at Coombe Abbey
MWA3716	Findspot - Roman pottery
MWA3717	Findspot - Medieval iron lock
MWA3718	Findspot - Medieval decorated tiles
MWA7071	Combe Abbey Landscape Park
MWA9658	Undated linear located by geophysical survey.
MWA9659	The former 19th century kitchen block at Coombe Abbey.
MWA9665	Post-medieval icehouse at Coombe Abbey.
MWA9667	Two post-medieval culverts at Coombe Abbey.
MWA10100	Area of ridge and furrow in Coombe Abbey Landscape Park
MWA8193	The Menagerie within Combe Abbey Deer Park

The majority of the Conservation Area extends across the area of the Registered Park and Garden of Coombe Abbey (GD1374).

Almost the entire conservation area is within the designed landscape of Coombe Abbey Park. The Western end of Coombe Abbey Woods, within the Country Park is marked on the Ordnance Survey First Edition. Prior to this the area appears to have been a medieval deer park.

#### HLC Records

HWA126	Broad-leaved Woods with Sinuous Boundaries
HWA129	Mixed Plantation
HWA127	Park/Garden



## MAP 2B ARCHAEOLOGY HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### ARCHITECTURE, BUILDING MATERIALS AND FEATURES

The abbey is the oldest building in the Conservation Area with elements remaining from the twelfth century. The organic growth of the building is clear with major development taking place over the course of a number of centuries. Modern alterations have taken place and new buildings erected to maintain this organic approach.

More consistency is found in the subordinate buildings to the rear of the abbey. The red brick and slate stable and the former tennis court buildings are consistent in materials and status. Other supporting buildings, such as cottages and the farmhouse, are of red brick and incorporate a rural style.

The more formal buildings tend to comprise stone. The gate piers announcing the entrance of the abbey are of stone and the west gate house incorporates formal elements including rusticated stone and a triumphal arch.

Walls feature prominently in the Conservation Area. The walled garden comprises a three metre high red brick wall enclosure. The garden wall to the west parterre comprises Sandstone ashlar and acts as a retaining wall. The structure includes fragments of fifteenth century fan vaulting. The garden wall to the east garden dates from the sixteenth/seventeenth century and is made of coursed squared sandstone and originally formed part of the outer wall of the Great Garden laid out around 1600. The

north garden wall to the Menagerie comprises a boundary wall of red brick with coping dating from around 1770 to 1778. The southern wall is from the same period.

### DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

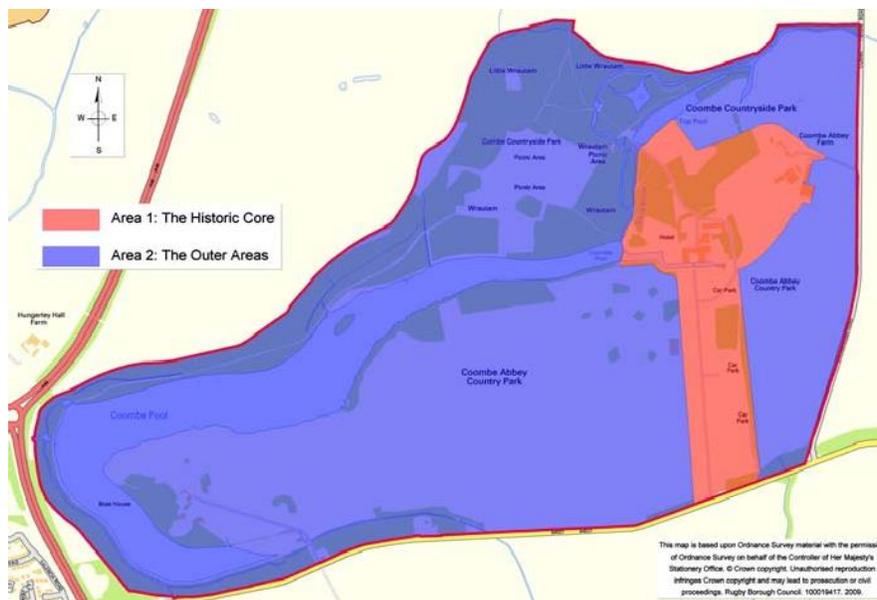
In order to make the appraisal more accessible the detailed assessment of the architectural and historic character has been divided into two smaller areas (see map below) and comprise:

Area 1: The Historic Core

Area 2: The Outer Areas

The zones are used as a tool to analyse and understand the area rather than to define whole areas as separate entities.

### MAP 3 SUB AREAS



#### Area 1: The Historic Core

Coombe Abbey is situated near to the centre of the site with subservient buildings to the rear. The abbey demonstrates different periods of development and has a greater status than the stables and stableyard. The approach to the abbey from the south is via the Lime tree avenues with the abbey framed by the trees. At the abbey the setting is provided by the formal gardens to the west, the nineteenth century park to the north-west, the eighteenth century pleasure grounds to the north-east and east and the productive area and nineteenth century pleasure grounds also to the north-east.

The status of the abbey is demonstrated by the impressive entrance from the south. It is framed by a pair of late eighteenth century rusticated piers of sandstone ashlar on a plinth. This leads to a double avenue of Limes and Horse Chestnut trees between which the drive leads in a linear form to the abbey. The mid nineteenth century stone bridge comprising Gothic arches leads the drive into the courtyard which is enclosed by the north, east and west ranges of the abbey.

The abbey is the primary structure and comprises three ranges. The house includes parts from the twelfth and fifteenth centuries including the cloisters to the west and north-west of the courtyard and the warming room to the south-east. The cloister arches are infilled with sixteenth century windows, the windows above are timber oriels. The eclectic ensemble is illustrated by this elevation which further east includes gables punctuating the eaves with stone mullioned and transomed windows. To each side the elevations project forward.

### **Photograph 6 The western elevation**



To the west the late seventeenth century element comprises three sections, each is under a gable with stone mullions within. Small scale horizontal windows, large scale mullioned and transomed windows and a vertical ecclesiastical window decorate the large elevation which is set with the moat as the foreground. The setting is completed with glimpses of the formal gardens to the west. To the east the range is modern. Of three storeys it comprises high pitched roofs, turrets and oriel windows and is an imposing addition. However, given the width of the ranges to the east the addition does not overwhelm.

This extension is also read from the rear elevation and contains formal elements including stone quoins, mullions, transoms and gables in addition to gothic motifs such as turrets.

The setting of the abbey is provided by the medieval style moat to the southern front with a bridge leading to the courtyard and a canal to the lake. To the east the moat terminates with a rock cascade. The formal garden to the west is laid out as an Italian garden comprising yew hedging with parterres, fountains and a marble statues. Further west the influence of water is again significant with the roofscape of the abbey reflected in the still water body that is fed by the moat.

**Photograph 7 The moat providing the immediate setting of the abbey**



This western facade comprises two elements. The southern part projects forwards under three gables with mullioned windows and stone quoins. The northern section is two storey under a hipped roof with pediment above. Greek and Roman motifs, stone quoins and armorial decoration within the pediment emphasis the classical elements of the design.

To the north of the abbey are a series of subordinate structures. Of mixed materials, including brick and sandstone ashlar, they compliment the main building. The siting of the stables was governed by the landscaping carried out by Capability Brown as the original range would have been obtrusive from the new approaches. The building is the focal point of the range of service buildings supporting the abbey. Of red brick with ashlar dressings under a slate hipped roof it is two storey with a six window range and a central projecting range. Above is a timber and lead clocktower in the form of a dovecote with an inscribed pediment.

**Photograph 8 The stables**



The building is read in conjunction with the former tennis court. Dating from the early nineteenth century it is of red brick and ashlar with a Welsh slate hipped roof and is a high single storey structure. A defining element is the high full length horizontal sliding sashes.

To the other side of the rear courtyard are two cottages and outbuildings. Previously a brewhouse and bakery it dates from the late eighteenth century and comprises sandstone ashlar under a slate roof. The building is two storey and the wide gable adds to the sense of enclosure within the rear courtyard.

These outbuildings are linked to the productive area and nineteenth century pleasure grounds to the north-east. The character of this area is dominated by red brick structures and the character is far removed from the grandeur of the abbey and the formal grounds. Viewed from the south the eastern side of the Conservation Area comprises a farmhouse and the walled garden. The Gardeners Cottage dates from the mid nineteenth century to the design of Eden Nesfield. The building is red brick with ashlar dressings under a plain tile roof, all in a Domestic Revival style. The farmhouse is set well back from the adjacent highway and is read in conjunction with the walled garden. The tall red brick walls surround the rectangular area with the formal approach characterised by the arches in the western wall. Three openings to each side of the drive are supported by stone columns. The inner area is now grass and all former structures have been removed. However, the area maintains its working characteristics.

### **Photograph 9 The walled garden**



Surrounding the brick structures are the remnants of the nineteenth century pleasure grounds. The land comprises grassland with significant tree planting. However, much of the intricate planting from the original layout has been lost.

The remaining setting for the abbey comprises the nineteenth century parkland to the north and north-west. Part of this parkland was formed under Capability Brown's works,

the remainder dates from the nineteenth century. The earlier planting has greater simplicity of species, the older areas contrasts with a far wider range of trees. The overall character is of woodland areas with large swathes of grassed area. Closer to the buildings the area has more of a managed feel with fewer trees, paths and grassland. The planting provides enclosure around the abbey and restricts views to the primary building.

### **Area 2: The Outer Areas**

The outer areas of the Conservation Area comprise large parts of grassland, the lake and a group of buildings to the western extremity of the designation. To the east of the southern approach fields border the more formal element of the area. To the south-west and west this character is maintained. These parts contribute to the open setting but do not provide significant visual interest in their own right.

The most prominent contributor is the great lake formed by Brown. The body is formed from the moat surrounding the abbey, curves southwards and returns partly to the east. The lake takes the view away from the abbey and leads the eye to the west. The sheer scale of the lake ensures it is the primary element in the landscape. The lake is enclosed to the north by the mature tree planting. To the south the boathouse sits on the southern side of the lake and is red brick with a plain tile roof.

As the lake commences its partial return to the east there is a further group of buildings. These comprise The Woodlands and its farm buildings. The former is a Menagerie viewing lodge with attached menagerie keeper's house, now a house. The structures date from the latter part of the eighteenth century and comprise sandstone ashlar with brick under a slate roof. The building contains a complex plan of polygonal wing to the left, a centre range and a projecting cross wing to the right. The building is an unusual feature within the landscape and it is modelled on the menagerie at Versailles.

### **Photograph 10 The lake**



To the north is a group of menagerie farm buildings. The buildings comprise red brick with a plain tile roof and form a loose courtyard with the main dwelling. The site is completed by the characterful red brick walls which feature throughout the site.

Although much of the historical definition of the grounds has been lost there are sufficient remnants of the estate to demonstrate its former scale and influence. One such structure is the western gate house. Dating from the latter part of the eighteenth century and probably designed by Capability Brown it comprises sandstone ashlar and end brick stacks. A defining characteristic is the Roman triumphal arch.

A further defining characteristic is as a result of the use of part of the Conservation Area for a country park. To the west of the approach avenue are the modern visitor centre and adventure playground. To the east hardstanding is provided for car parking together with the associated paraphernalia such as ticket machines and barriers.

### **Photograph 11 Use of the site as a country park**



### **CONTRIBUTION OF UNLISTED BUILDINGS**

The majority of buildings in the Conservation Area are listed; unlisted buildings are therefore rare. However, a pair of cottages, at the entrance to The Woodlands, makes a positive contribution providing a red brick cottage character. Within the historic core the new accommodation building to the north-west provides further enclosure around the abbey and contributes to the organic development of the site.

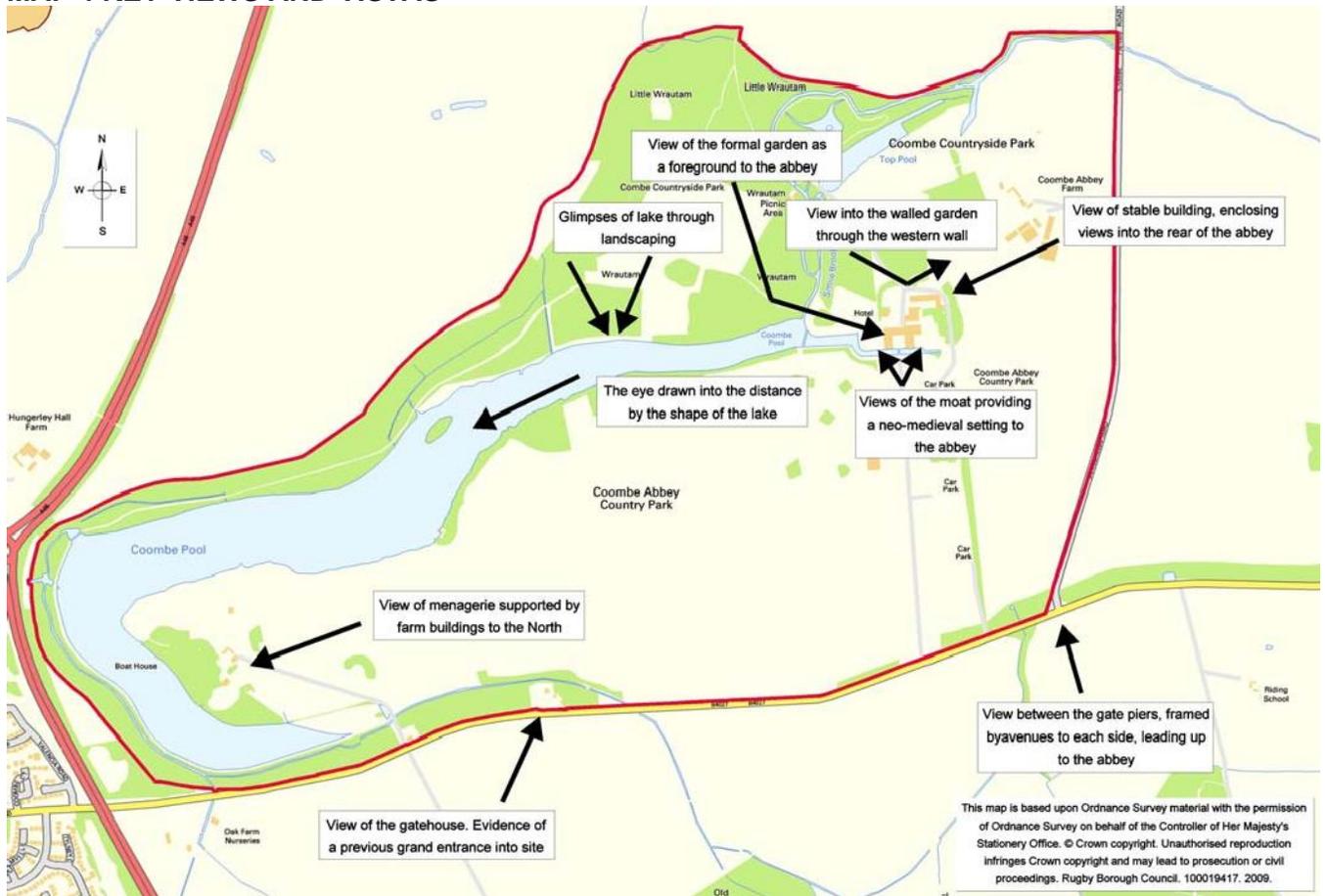
## MAP 5 LISTED BUILDINGS AND IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



### STREET FURNITURE

Street furniture is an important element in Conservation Areas reinforcing local identity. Signs are consistent and kept to a minimum and timber posts are used to direct visitors. Street lighting is limited to decorative lamps. Timber bollards and low level timber rails are used to border grassed areas and have a relatively limited impact. The lack of clutter benefits the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

## MAP 4 KEY VIEWS AND VISTAS



## EXISTENCE OF ANY NEUTRAL AREAS

The environmental quality of the Conservation Area is generally good but there are a number of neutral elements. The use of the site as a country park has had an inevitable impact through additional drives, hardsurfacing for car parks and adventure play grounds. The visitors building is large and of a monumental style but appears rather at odds with its surroundings.

Part of the character of the area is the trees and woodland. However, greater woodland and tree management, in order to reintroduce the historic planting patterns, would benefit the Conservation Area.

## CONCLUSIONS

The historic character of Coombe Abbey has been well maintained and many of the architectural details in the older buildings have been preserved. The organic development of the central core of buildings can still be read and are well related to the remains of the three main phases of landscape development. The designation comprises two character areas; the central group of buildings and the surrounding landscaping and the wider environment.

The overall quality of the Conservation Area remains high with the traditional buildings and historic landscape prevailing. Changes have taken place to buildings and

landscaping but the designation retains its integrity. Enhancements could be achieved however with development of the landscaping to reflect more elements of the former layout and restoration of key areas such as the walled garden.

## **PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT**

### **General Condition**

The Conservation Area is in a generally good condition in terms of buildings and maintenance of open spaces and landscaping. There are no primary buildings at risk or any in a serious state of disrepair. However, the walled garden is in a poor state of repair and all former buildings and structures within the enclosure have been lost. The farm buildings serving The Woodlands also require additional work. A number of minor structures around the estate would benefit from repairs.

### **Problems, pressure and capacity to change**

The sheer scale of the site makes long term management difficult. This is illustrated by the derelict condition of the abbey towards the latter part of the twentieth century. Ongoing repairs and maintenance of the historic buildings is costly and necessary. This also applies to the management of the landscaping. A long term management plan is required for implementation to provide greater evidence of the former landscaping phases and to ensure the continued regeneration of trees.

The use of the land as a hotel and country park brings its own pressures. The hotel is a commercial operation; however a large amount of its appeal is the building and its surroundings. The heritage and commercial interests are not always served by the same undertakings and this can lead to pressure for development that at times may not be in the best interest of the historic site and buildings. However, a balance is needed as the hotel represents a beneficial use of the building. The country park is a local resource and is to be encouraged. However, the needs of the country park again need to be balanced with the heritage issues of the site.

A further issue is the fragmented ownership. The abbey and large areas of the landscape are owned by Coventry City Council and within this area there are a number of privately owned properties. Therefore achieving an overall long term vision and effective management of the Conservation Area is a greater challenge.

### **Future management proposals**

The Local Planning Authority has a duty to ensure that proposals for development either preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Rugby Borough Council is committed to this duty.

In order to ensure that proposals for development can be adequately addressed the submission of detailed plans and elevations will be required with the submission of any planning application within the Conservation Area. This is likely to require the submission of drawings relating to new building within its context and street scene. 1:50 scale drawings of plans and elevations are considered an appropriate scale. For more detailed proposals and for specific elements of a proposed scheme, for example

fenestration details, scale drawings of 1:5 or 1:10 may be required. A Design and Access Statement will also be necessary.

**Opportunities for enhancement**

Although the visual quality of the Conservation Area is high there are areas where improvements could take place:

- ensure planting schemes and species follows historic themes;
- carry out tree surgery to mature trees as agreed;
- remove alien species such as conifers;
- re-instate wherever possible the late nineteenth century views to the south and west from the abbey;
- resurface the stable courtyard in granite setts or similar;
- consider re-using historic buildings for original purposes, e.g. keeping horses in the stables;
- provide a greater level of landscaping within the parking areas;
- resurface the car parks in a more sensitive material;
- remove planting to re-open intended views;
- restore the use of the walled garden to cultivation together with provision of structures, following historic evidence;
- clear rainwater goods to prevent fabric damage.

## APPENDIX 1

### Summary of listed buildings in Coombe Abbey Conservation Area

West Lodge, Grade II\*. House, formerly gate lodge, c.1775. Probably designed by Capability Brown. Sandstone ashlar with some brick to ends. Lead roof removed. Brick stacks to ends. 2 storeys, 2 window range with one storey, one bay wings to left and right. In style of a Roman triumphal arch. Central archway. To left and right a round-headed sash of 12 panes, with further 12 pane sashes to wings with wedge lintels. Above round headed sashes to left and right a blind window with wedge lintels. Flanking arch, and to corners of main range, Corinthian pilasters supporting entablature. Plinth and first floor storey band. Parapet to flanking wings. Urns to left and right corners of main range decorated with festoons. This building was designed as the lodge to the new main drive, laid out as part of the new landscape garden by Capability Brown 1771-1776.

Gate Piers, Coombe Abbey, Grade II. Late C18. Sandstone ashlar. Pier is rusticated and has a plinth. Panelled top decorated with festoons, flutes and paterae.

Garden Wall, Coombe Abbey, 40 metres NW of front to garden steps, Grade II. Wall. Sandstone ashlar incorporated fragments of C15 fan vaulting, probably from Coombe Abbey. Buttressed. Included for group value.

Kitchen garden and associated bothies, gardeners cottage 130 north east of Coombe Abbey, Grade II. Gardeners cottage, bothy and adjoining kitchen garden walls. 1863-5, by Eden Nesfield for the Earl of Craven, late C20 alterations. Red brick, with ashlar dressings and plain tile roofs. Domestic Revival style, cottage has 2 external side wall stacks with ashlar copings. 2 storey, 2 bays, L plan. Windows are wooden glazing bar casements, some renewed late C20. Garden front has projecting wing to left, half hipped, with 3 light casement to ground floor, and 4 light casement above. In the return angle, a hipped porch with pointed arched doorway and original half glazed door. Chimney to right has an inscribed plaque. Rear has central bay with hipped roof, lean to porch and side door, flanked by left by gabled projecting wing and to right by hipped wing. All have a single window on each floor. C20 single storey addition to north. Bothy in similar style has 2 storey block to north and lower range, single storey plus attics, to south. Garden front has 2 windows to ground floor and central C20 lean to addition. Above, 2 light casement in central hipped through eaves dormer, flanked by prominent side wall stacks, that to right with an inscribed plaque. Rear has an off centre door in an altered opening, prominent side wall stacks, that to right with an inscribed plaque. Rear has an off centre door in an altered opening, flanked by a single 2 light casement to the right, and 2 similar windows to left. Above, a large hipped through eaves dormer with a 4 light casement, and to right a single small window. Lower range has to right a segment headed door flanked to left by a 3 light casement and beyond, 2 smaller 2 light casements. Above, to right, a 2 light casement in a hipped through eaves dormer. Garden walls, approx. 3 m high, have stone and blue brick copings, and form a rectangular enclosure. North range has 2 doors, an inserted opening, and adjoining the bothy, a range of single storey lean to buildings with slate roofs. Brackets on the north side formerly carrying line shafting. At the west end, an arcade, now with inserted central opening, with alternating round and square granite piers. South side has an opening with square piers.

Coombe Abbey Stable Block, Grade II. Late C18. Brick in Flemish bond with ashlar dressings and hipped slate roof. Brick roof stacks. 2 storeys, 6 window range, with one window projecting central ridge. Central archway with rusticated quoin surround. Small doorway to right of blocked arch, with stone lintel. Round headed recessed casements to ground storey, the one to the right of arch partly blocked. Gauged brick lintels. 9 pane casements to first floor with gauged brick lintels. Pediment above. Sandstone, plinth, ground and first floor storey bands, and a moulded eaves cornice. Wood and lead clocktower, in form of dovecote, above pediment inscribed 'Vivete Fugid'. Altered ranges to left, and extending forward from right. Late C19 coach house and hayloft to rear, probably designed by Nesfield. Dated 1863.

Boat House on south side of The Pool, Grade II. C. 1770-78. With later alterations. Probably by Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Red brick and plain tile roof. Single storey. Open ended to the pool and entrance door opposite. King post roof construction possibly early C19. The boathouse is marked on a plan of 1778.

Woodlands, Grade II. Hunting Lodge, now house. Late C18 with C9 additions. Probably by Capability Brown. Sandstone ashlar, with some brick. Slate and lead roofs with ashlar stacks. Complex plan of polygonal wing to left, centre range and projecting cross wing to right. 2 storeys, 5 window range. C20 plank doors within hexagonal porch with wood modillion eaves cornice. 12 pane unhorned sashes to ground floor of left polygonal range, to right of door and to front of wing to right. One blind window to right facade of wing. 9 pane unhorned sashes to first floor of polygonal range, those to main range and right wing with keyblocks. Plinth and first floor storey band. Stone modillion eaves cornice.

Wall to south of The Woodlands, Grade II. Boundary wall, c.1770-78 with later alterations. By Lancelot Brown. Red brick with coping in part and remains of bases for urns. This wall extends south east of The Woodlands to the edge of the pool and is approx. 2-3 m in height but has occasional gap or area of collapse. The wall was originally built by Brown together with that to north of The Woodlands to cut off the area of land bordering The Pool which he had formed into a Menagerie. The area is named as such and the wall is shown on the plan of 1778.

Wall to north of The Woodlands, Grade II. Boundary wall, c.1770-78 with later alterations. By Lancelot Brown. Red brick with coping in part and remains of bases for urns. This wall extends north and north east of The Woodlands to the edge of the pool and is approx. 3 m in height but has occasional gap or area of collapse. The wall was originally built by Brown together with that to south of The Woodlands to cut off the area of land bordering The Pool which he had formed into a Menagerie. The area is named as such and the wall is shown on the plan of 1778. (attached to the western side of this wall a range of single storey outbuildings. Red brick with plain tile roofs and a single ridge stack. Central range has to right 2 doorways with plank doors flanked by a single 2 light glazing bar casement. Set back to right remodelled C19 wing. Set back to left an original wing with 2 plank doors and two 2 light casements. These buildings were built to serve the Menagerie, to provide food storage and winter quarters for the exotic animals kept here.

Menagerie farmbuildings, north west of The Woodlands, Grade II. C.1778. Built to serve the Menagerie designed by Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Red brick with plain tile. Two 1

plan ranges linked by a gate. The larger northern range has a two storey wing to the west with a segment headed carriage arches, that to the right with double plank doors. Beyond to the right a stable door flanked by single 2 light glazing bar casements all with segment heads. Above 3 tall 2 light glazing bar casements to the eaves. Beyond to right a slightly set back lower range with a single stable door. This range continues at right angles with a further stable door and becomes single storey with two stable doors and a shuttered opening between. The smaller southern range, single storey with the 2 cart entrances to the north range, and 2 bricked up cart shed entrances to the south range that to the left with a 3 light glazing bar casement. Beyond a single plank door flanked by single light glazing bar casements. These buildings are extremely rare, they were built to store food and bedding for the animals in the Menagerie, and they also provided space for sheltered winter accommodation for these exotic beasts.

Tennis Court, Grade II\*. Former tennis court. C.1820 or possibly earlier C19. Red brick (one east wall rendered) with Welsh slate hipped roof. High single storey. Later entrance doors to rendered wall with C20 sliding doors on long wall to left. On both long walls are recessed blank panels with gauged brick flat arches. Above running full length are horizontal sliding sash windows with glazing bars, cantelivered out and forming galleries. Blocked windows and C20 door on rear wall.

2 cottages and outbuildings, 30 m from north front, Grade II. Formerly perhaps pavilion/stable. Late C18. Sandstone ashlar with slate roof and 3 stone stacks to roof. 2 storeys plus attic, 3 window range. Gable facing which has pediment of full width with moulded cornices. 3 recessed round headed arches to ground floor with thermal windows in arches, and blind below. Central arch has CV20 door inserted. Three 6 pane sashes above wedge lintels. Thermal window to centre with pediment. Raised band at impost level on ground floor. Further 6 pane sashes to side and rear. Moulded stone cornices. Bitumen and lead coated coped gables. Included for group value.

Garden wall, to south and west of Stableblock, Grade II. Late C16/early C17 with later rebuilding. Coursed squared sandstone approx. 2,5 metres high. The L plan wall extends approx. 50m south from the south east corner of part of the stable block and approx 25 m east of the same point. this wall was part or the outerwall of the Great Garden laid out c1600 and is shown on Knyff and Kip's perspective view of Coombe Abbey of c1690.

Coombe Abbey and Bridge over moat, Grade I. Country House, formerly Cistercian Abbey. C12 origins with C13, late C16, late C17 and C19 alterations and additions, in part by Issac Gibson and William WInde. Sandstone ashlar with tiled and slate roofs. U plan. Entrance facade to inner left of courtyard comprises C15 cloister with C16 additions above. Plank door within C19 stone porch to centre right. 9 bays of stone C15 four light cusped windows with 4 centred arch heads. Buttressed between windows. To far left a block round-headed arch. First floor stuccoed timber frame and stone built late C16. 7 wood oriel windows of 4 leaded lights with mullions and transoms and gabled heads supported on consoles. Range continuing forward from right has second storey of 2 four light wood casements. Moulded eaves cornice above. Range opposite entrance facade has remains of late C12 Chapter House with central arch of 4 orders of shafts and capitals. Arches to either side of 2 round headed lights within round headed arch supported on 3 orders of shafts, the middle paired. To either side a round headed arch of 3 orders. Blocked arch to right. Additions by Nesfield built above in 1860's

demolished 1925. To right, remains of C12 warming room rebuilt by Nesfield, with some original details. Garden front of 2 ranges. To left, 2 storey 7 window range designed by William Winde, 1680-91. 24 pane sashes to ground and first floor with moulded architraves and triangular pediments, segmental pediments and flat hoods supported on consoles. Central first floor window has flat hood supported on fluted columns with capitals. Central 3 bay section projects slightly forward, the angles quoined. Pediment above was carved by Howard Pierce. Modillion eave cornice. Range to left, and attic storey were demolished 1925. Rainwater heads dated 1684. Mid C17 wing to right by Issac Gibson of 2 storeys. Paired sashes to ground and first floors originally had mullions and transoms, and have moulded architraves. 3 light stone mullioned windows to second floor gables. First and second floor windows have hood moulds. C20 bay to ground floor. Left angle of range has quoins. North facade: site of William Winde's North Saloon remains. East facade: site of Nesfield's east range demolished C20, of which Neo-Norman arches on ground floor remain.

The Woodlands Menagerie, Grade II\*. Menagerie viewing lodge and attached menagerie keepers house, now house. C1775 with C19 and C20 alterations. Probably Capability Brown. Sandstone ashlar with some brick. Slate and lead roofs with ashlar stacks. Complex plan of polygonal wing to left, centre range and projecting cross wing to right. 2 storeys, 5 window range. C20 plank door with hexagonal porch with wood modillion eaves cornice. 12 pane unhorned sashes to ground floor of left polygonal range, to right of door and to front of wing to right. One blind window to right facade of wing. 9 pane unhorned sashes to first floor of polygonal range, those to main range and right wing with keyblocks. Plinth and first floor storey band. Stone modillion eaves cornice.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Useful Contacts**

A copy of this appraisal will be available at the Rugby Borough Council offices and on the Council's website at [www.rugby.gov.uk](http://www.rugby.gov.uk).

For specific information about the conservation area and conservation issues please contact:

Development Strategy  
Rugby Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Evreux Way  
Rugby  
CV21 2RR

Tel: 01788 533 533

Email: [localplan@rugby.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@rugby.gov.uk)

For further information relating to archaeology contact:

County Archaeologist  
Warwickshire Museum Field Services  
The Butts  
Warwick CV34 4SS  
Tel: 01926 412276  
Fax: 01926 412974

For further information relating to listed buildings and conservation areas contact:

Historic England  
The Axis  
10 Holliday Street  
Birmingham  
B1 1TG

Tel: 0121 625 6888  
Email: [midlands@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:midlands@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

For detailed advice on repairing and restoring Georgian houses, contact:

The Georgian Group  
6 Fitzroy Square  
London  
W1T 5DX

Tel: 087 1750 2936  
Email: [office@georgiangroup.org.uk](mailto:office@georgiangroup.org.uk)

For "Care for Victorian Houses" leaflet, contact:

The Victorian Society  
1 Priory Gardens  
Bedford Park  
London  
W4 1TT

Tel: 020 8994 1019  
Email: [admin@victoriansociety.org.uk](mailto:admin@victoriansociety.org.uk)

For a range of technical advice leaflets, contact:

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)  
37 Spital Square  
London  
E1 6DY

Tel: 020 7377 1644.  
Email: [info@spab.org.uk](mailto:info@spab.org.uk)

## APPENDIX 3

### Bibliography

Archaeology and Planning (PPG16)

The Buildings of England – Warwickshire. Nikolaus Pevsner and Alexandra Wedgewood. Penguin Books

Houses of Warwickshire

Parklands Consortium Ltd Ten Year Management and Maintenance Plan

Warwickshire Towns and Villages, Geoff Allen, pub Sigma Leisure, 2000

Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5)

Rugby Borough Local Plan 2006 Saved Policies

Submission Core Strategy

## GLOSSARY

**Bargeboards:** board at the gable of a building covering the ends of the horizontal roof timbers and forming a 'V', often pierced and decorated.

**Bay window:** window of one or more storeys projecting from the face of the window at ground level.

**Casement:** window hinged at the side.

**Corbel:** block of brick projecting from a wall.

**Dormer window:** window standing up vertically from the slope of a roof.

**Framed building:** where the structure is carried by the framework.

**Mullion:** vertical member between the lights of a window opening.

**Rendering:** the process of covering outside walls with a uniform skin to protect from the weather.

**Transom:** horizontal member between the lights of a window opening.

**Vernacular:** the traditional local construction style.