Firbeck

The village of Firbeck lies between Maltby and Oldcotes off the A634 and B6463 roads, 15 km to the east of Rotherham Town Centre. The village stands at the heart of the Civil Parish of Firbeck and the electoral ward of Dinnington. The surrounding countryside is predominantly agricultural, washed over Green Belt in the Unitary Development Plan and designated as an area of High Landscape Value. Topographically, the village sits in gently undulating countryside at an elevation of approximately 50 metres above sea level. The built up area of the village covers approximately 11 Hectares and there are approximately 110 households. The area of the proposed Conservation Area is 3.9 hectares (9.8 acres).

As far as services are concerned, the village has a Public House, The Black Lion, and a village hall. There are no shops or post office. Public transport is limited and infrequent.

Firbeck was on the 1975 reserve list and was again looked at during the Conservation Review of 1992 when it was recommended for designation as a new Conservation Area.

Origins and Development

The name Firbeck is probably derived from the stream in its woodland setting, Firth meaning a wooded area or a clearing in a wood and Beck being a Danelaw term for a stream. The name has varied through the ages. William West, who built the first Firbeck Hall in 1594, published a will in 1598 which refers to Firbecke. A map at Worksop College of 1600 referred to Firbeck while John Speeds map of but 10 years later, refers to Furbeck.

No documentary evidence has been found to prove Firbecks existence before 1171, but the names with Norse connections such as Thwaite, Sandbeck and possibly Firbeck itself, suggest the valley could have been occupied from much earlier times.

Figure 1 Distinctive village sign, junction of New Road & Kid Lane

Figure 2 Firbeck Hall

Figure 3 Grade II listed Yew Tree House, New Road
Prior to the Norman Conquest, the area was held by the Saxon Earls Harold and Edwin of Conisbrough and Laughton respectively. After the conquest, three Norman families held the land, the De Buslis, the Mortons and the De Warreners. Roger De Busli held the largest share based at Tickhill Castle. However, in the early stages of the villages development, the biggest impact on the area was the building of Roche Abbey in the 12th Century.

From the late 16th Century onwards, the village and its environs would have been dominated by Firbeck Hall, the original core of the building constructed by the aforementioned William West, a notable practitioner of the law formerly of Moorgate Hall in Rotherham. The house was significantly remodelled in the mid 18th Century and again in the early 19th Century by William Hurst, architect, on behalf of Henry Gally Knight, a significant figure in the history of the area. In 1935, Cyril Nicholson a stockbroker from Sheffield, opened the Hall as a country club, investing £80000 in its renovation, at which stage the interior was drastically modernised. After the Second World War, the building was bought by the Miners Welfare Commission who used it as a rehabilitation centre for injured miners until 1984.

Also of significance, is the villages connection with the world of horse racing. In 1761 Colonel Anthony St Leger married Elizabeth Wombwell and in 1765 they purchased the Park Hill Estate. Legend has it that in 1776 a race was held on the oval field still visible today, between Firbeck and Langold, commemorated on the village plaque. This was the beginning of the world famous St Leger which is still run every September at Doncaster Races. During the 20th Century there were two distinct phases of housebuilding which have produced the village we see today. In
the 1950’s a number of town house/semi-detached properties were built along New Road to the west of St Martins church with the prime purpose of housing workers from the saw mill operation in Princes Plantation off Penny Hill to the west of the village. In the 1960’s another 35 detached/bungalow properties were added to the south of New Road and to the west of New Road on the approach to the village.

Architectural Style

Pre 20th Century architectural style is uniform with buildings constructed of limestone topped with a mixture of red pantile and stone slate roofs. There are also examples of clay pantile roofs with the bottom three courses in clay slate, a feature characteristic of this area of the Borough.

Building height is also uniform amongst the older buildings with the vast majority being two storey, a notable exception being the two and a half storey farmhouse at Manor Farm. Roof shape varies with examples of both hipped and simple ridge types. Chimney stacks are predominantly constructed of stone though there are scattered examples built of brick.

The majority window type is various forms of casement though there are notable exceptions such as the horizontal sliding sashes on 3 Lime Avenue and the mullion windows in Manor Farmhouse. Fortunately, inappropriate window replacement in the older properties is almost non-existent.

Architecturally, the 20th Century properties are more mixed, with dormer bungalows constructed of artificial stone and tiled roofs around Kingswood Close and brick built detached two storey houses dominating around St Martins Close.
In terms of 20th Century development, it is worth noting the new housing development adjacent the Black Lion public house. Built of stone and topped with red pantiles these properties also incorporate design features such as the tiled porch which reflect previous development in the village. It is hoped that since there completion, these houses have become a welcome addition to the street scene and can act as an example to any future development that may take place in the village.

There are ten listed buildings within the village itself.

- Church of St Martin, New Road (Grade II) Rebuilt 1812, north aisle added 1844, tower added in 1900.
- Knight Family Memorial to the south west of church porch (Grade II) 18th Century Monumental gravestone
- 23, 25 and 27 New Road (Grade II). Row of three mid to late 19th Century houses.
- Manor Cottage, 15 and 17 New Road (Grade II) Row of three late 18th Century houses.
- Yew Tree House, New Road (Grade II). Mid 19th Century house.
- Cottage adjoining Park Hill Social Club, Lime Avenue (Grade II) Late 18th Century.
- Manor Farmhouse, New Road (Grade II) Manorial Farmhouse dating from the late 16th/early 17th Century.
- 79 New Road (Grade II) Cottage for the St Leger estate of Park Hill, dated 1876.
- Willow Cottage, New Road (Grade II) Two cottages now one for the St Leger Estate, dated 1876.
- Farmbuilding at Park Hill Farm (Grade II). Early 17th Century farmbuilding to immediate west of Park Hill Farm.

In addition to the listed buildings, there are a number of unlisted buildings of local interest that contribute to the character of the village particularly around Black Lion corner. Apart from the pub itself, also of note are Lion Cottage and The Beeches, an unspoilt early 19th Century building that is perhaps worthy of listing.
Boundaries

Boundaries are traditionally defined by limestone walls topped with a variety of different coping stones. Gate piers, where they survive, are generally of a simple design. These are supplemented in many areas of the village by neatly trimmed hedges.

Generally, there is a positive absence of modern brick and pre-cast concrete walling.

On the eastern fringe of the village, running in a north to south direction is the boundary wall to Firbeck Hall. This separates the village from the grounds of the estate and forms a logical boundary for any possible Conservation Area.

Particularly noteworthy boundary features are

- The wall running along the north side of Lime Avenue which features
  - an arch headed doorway and segmental headed windows suggesting a possible former Lodge to the Hall. Fronting this wall is an impressive stone sett pavement.
- The entrance to the Church of St Martin, featuring set back square gate piers with Bell shaped caps supporting a decorative wrought iron arch with central lantern. The double oak gates, a modern addition dated 2000, are also impressive.

Open Spaces and Trees

The village benefits visually from a large number of mature trees both in public areas and in the gardens of private houses. An unusually high percentage of these are protected by individual Tree Preservation Orders.

Apart from the grassed areas opposite the church, there are no significant public spaces. However, this is more than compensated for by the high standard of private gardens, many of which are visible from public areas. These include
some outstanding examples of topiary notably the eight trimmed bushes fronting 13 New Road and the remarkable tree growing around the windows of the neighbouring property, 15 New Road.

Views

Firbeck nestles at the head of a shallow valley through which runs Lamb Lane Dyke. There are significant wooded areas on both the western and eastern fringes of the village. Consequently views from the village perimeter are somewhat restricted particularly to the south where the views reach up as far as the ridge line at Lamb Lane. To the north, the land is flatter and there are views out towards Firbeck Dyke and Stone.

Within the village itself, the most significant view is along New Road which gives a 600 metre tree lined uninterrupted stretch reinforcing the villages rural, estate village character.

Also of significance is the view on the approach to the village past Firbeck Hall. This provides an interesting contrast as the wild hedgerows give way to the neatly trimmed hedges of the village.

The rolling topography of the surrounding area allows for some key long distant views both in and out of the village exemplified by the one to the left (figure 17 taken from Kings Wood Lane)
Features

Minor features that often reflect a village's history can greatly enhance the character of a Conservation Area. In Firbeck these include:

- The remarkable village sign on Kid Lane. Carved in oak, this depicts on one side a plough team in the fields with aircraft flying above, a reference to the mid 20th Century when the adjacent aerodrome was used by the Royal Air Force. On the reverse side is a scene of horse racing at Doncaster Race Course reminding us of the running of the original St Ledger in nearby fields. Arguably the most impressive village sign in Rotherham.
- The red telephone box on New Road, no longer in use but thankfully preserved and maintained.
- The original finger post on New Road, typical of the eastern area of the Borough
- The sundial, dated 1821, on the south elevation of the Church of St Martin.
- The stone statue of a lion standing perched on top of the gable end chimney stack to Lion Cottage.

Figure 18 Sculpted vegetation cover, 15 New Road

Figure 19 Old fashioned style finger post, New Road

Figure 20 Old style red telephone box, New Road
Detrimental Aspects

Within the historic core of the settlement, sympathetic restoration and maintenance has kept detrimental aspects to a minimum. Unlike other settlements in the Borough, inappropriate window, door and roof replacement is extremely rare, and on the contrary, examples of good practice, some of which have been alluded to above, are commonplace. These set useful precedents for any future Conservation Area designation.

Since falling into disuse, the former Park Hill social club has been boarded up and an eyesore at the heart of the village. The building had been poorly maintained and has an unattractive appearance particularly with its large flat roofed extensions.

In 2016, planning permission was sought for the demolition of the building and its replacement with a single dwelling house and double garage. The proposal was subject to careful scrutiny resulting from Firbeck’s status as a washed over green belt village and the sites close proximity to 3, Lime Avenue, a Grade II listed building and two important tree’s along the western boundary which are protected by tree preservation orders.

Ultimately, It was considered that the greater majority of the building harmed the setting of the adjacent Grade II Listed Building and its removal and replacement with the proposed dwelling is considered to enhance the surrounding area and the setting of the neighbouring Listed Building.

After a considerable debate, planning permission for the new dwelling was subsequently granted. Again, as for the new houses adjacent the Black Lion, the new dwelling and garage are to be built of natural stone with a red pantile roof, reflecting the character of the existing settlement.
Recommendations

Despite a significant amount of expansion during the 20th Century, the historic core of Firbeck is remarkably well preserved and has managed to maintain the uniformity and character of a typical estate village.

The village was included on the 1975 reserve list of potential Conservation Areas and was again recommended for designation in the 1992 review. However, in 1992, the boundary proposed included Firbeck Hall and its grounds and the whole of the village envelope to the west of St Martins Church.

The proposed boundary today is significantly reduced. Under the latest proposal, Firbeck Hall and its grounds are excluded with the estate boundary wall running through Lime Avenue forming the boundary.

On the western fringe, the proposed boundary has again been modified. Along New Road, it is proposed to end the boundary at number 37. Beyond this point, the buildings are predominantly mid to late 20th century and of less architectural merit with the exception of the two remarkable arts and crafts style houses, Willow Cottage and 79 New Road. However, these are both Grade II listed and, therefore adequately protected in their own right.

![Figure 22 The recently renovated, 79 New Road. Outstanding example of a Grade II listed Arts and Crafts house](image-url)