

WIGSTON ALL SAINTS CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Wigston All Saints Conservation Area was first designated in 1977. This document aims to fulfill Oadby and Wigston Borough Council's duty to 'draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement' of the area as required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It should be read in conjunction with the 'Development Control Guidance for the Wigston All Saints Conservation Area' which has been produced to accompany this appraisal.

1.2 Extensive public consultation was carried out, and the draft documents amended in light of the representations received. In summary, the consultation composed:

- A full colour leaflet summarising the Conservation Area Appraisal and the associated Development Control Guidance was prepared, and together with a short questionnaire was issued to some 1200 properties in the Conservation Area and immediately outside the current boundary.
- A copy of the leaflet and questionnaire was also distributed to key stakeholders.
- A public exhibition was staged in the Wigston Magna Methodist Church on Wednesday 19 July 2006 between 12.00pm and 8.00pm.

A 'Report of Consultation' was prepared and is available from the Borough Council.

2.0 What are Conservation Areas?

2.1 Conservation Areas are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

2.2 When a Conservation Area has been designated, it increases the Council's controls, with planning applications judged by their impact on the character and appearance of the area. Greater controls over the demolition of buildings and structures are imposed whilst the rights which owners have to do works to their properties without planning permission (known as 'permitted development rights') are reduced or can be taken away. Stricter controls are also exercised over the design of new buildings, and owners must give the Council six weeks' notice of their intention to carry out works to trees. Planning applications affecting a Conservation Area must be advertised on site and in the local press to give people the opportunity to comment.

3.0 Overview of the Area

3.1 This area formed the southern core of Wigston Magna village and includes some of the most historically and architecturally significant buildings in the Borough. The survival of these traditional properties in this area provides an indication of the original character of the village of Wigston Magna before it became a suburb of Leicester.

3.2 This southern core is centred around the Church of All Saints which formed one of the 'Two Steeples' of 'Wigston Magna District of Two-Steeples' as the settlement came to be known by 1529. It is very much the focal point of the Conservation Area and is an important local feature.

3.3 Newgate End retains a village like feel with its attractive group of older vernacular properties. This contrasts with the more mixed development of mostly later C19 or C20 development that has occurred along Moat Street and Bushloe End.

3.4 It is a predominantly residential area, but fragments of Wigston's hosiery industry remain in Bushloe End and Moat Street with the survival of framework knitters' buildings and workshops. The Framework Knitters Museum in Bushloe End is an important local attraction.

3.5 The area is located at the southwestern corner of the rectangular village centre that contains 'The Lanes' a system of footpaths that connects the two cores of the original village of Wigston Magna.

4.0 Brief History / Archaeology

4.1 According to legend, the name Wigston originated from Crown Prince Wigstan, heir to the Kingdom of Mercia who was murdered in 849AD by Berhtwulf, the Regent King. Shortly after his death, he was declared a saint and a church has been dedicated to St Wistan or (Wystan) ever since.

4.2 Some relics from Roman times have been discovered within the modern Borough of Oadby and Wigston and evidence of an Iron Age farmstead has been found approximately 5 miles from Wigston at Enderby. Evidence of mankind's habitation of the local area from further back in time has also been found, however, the village of Wigston appears to be Anglo-Saxon in origin. Anglo-Saxon archaeological findings dated to c550AD trace mankind's habitation of the Wigston area to at least the C6. These discoveries of Anglo-Saxon invaders include human bones, smashed skulls, broken sword, pieces of armour and jewellery.

4.3 At the centre of modern Wigston are 'The Lanes' which may well have been the site of the original Anglo-Saxon settlement until it was abandoned when the Vikings invaded towards the end of the C9. Two settlements became established with two churches - eventually becoming known as the Wigston Magna District of Two Steeples in 1529.

4.4 The Anglo-Saxon community was centred around St Wistan's Church and the Viking community centred around All Saints' Church. The Vikings were originally pagan, but converted to Christianity and founded the church dedicated to All Saints as they had no close historical liaison to any particular saint.

4.5 The Viking settlement grew around Newgate End where the land was slightly higher, giving the Vikings strategic views over their conquered territory. The settlement expanded along what is now Moat Street towards Cross Street which used to 'cross' the village green. The Anglo-Saxon settlement grew along Bull Head Street. Eventually the two settlements amalgamated forming the rectangular village centre bounded by Moat Street, Bull Head Street, Bell Street and Long Street.

4.6 After both communities combined, the agricultural land of the settlement was extended in a joint venture between the descendents of both Anglo-Saxons and

Vikings. This involved clearing surrounding wood and scrubland in strips resulting in 3 Medieval fields called Goldhill, Mucklow and Thythornhill.

4.7 In 1381 Wigston was the largest place in Leicestershire outside the County Town. The total area of the Medieval fields and the inhabited village encompassed an area of approximately 3000 acres and Magna (meaning 'great') was added to the village name in 1453.

4.8 A moated homestead, at which Oliver Cromwell is reputed to have stayed, was built at the southeastern end of the Conservation Area. By the early 1700s it was in ruins, but its existence is commemorated by the name of the adjacent street - Moat Street.

4.9 As the population increased, communications and markets increased too. Roads were improved and as they developed, farming practices changed. The open communal field methods of subsistence farming were brought to an end by The Wigston Enclosure Act which was passed in 1764 and field enclosures were completed in 1766.

4.10 With enclosure, smallholders could not afford to buy land and smallholders of subsistence farming became almost non-existent as peasant farmers diminished and framework knitting became their full time occupation instead of the part-time income supplementation it had been before. However, with increased mechanisation and the establishment of the many hosiery factories that characterised the area throughout the C19, the framework knitter society eventually perished too.

4.11 In the C19 canal and railway developments occurred in the original Medieval fields bringing other people to live in what had been a predominately agricultural society. This industrialisation also opened up the choice of employment and resulted in the expansion of building to meet industrial and housing needs. From the early 1900s until the beginning of World War II, building development continued in several locations within the old Medieval fields area.

4.12 Increasing industrialisation resulted in the construction of the Wigston Gasworks that were located at the bottom of what was a continuation of Newgate End. The Gasworks were constructed in the 1850s, operational by 1861 and provided some streetlighting along a few streets in the village.

4.13 The growth of the Wigston Magna local district resulted in the development of South Wigston, East Wigston, Wigston Fields and, more recently, the modern Wigston Harcourt. The Urban District of Wigston was formed in 1930, but by 1974 the Oadby and Wigston Borough had been created and Wigston had become a borough of Leicester..

5.0 Setting

5.1 Wigston lies approximately 4 miles south southeast of Leicester whose southeast edge, it adjoins. It is almost indistinct as a settlement in its own right and only small areas of open land, mostly parks, remain to separate it from Leicester to the north.

5.2 To the south and west, Wigston's outer limits are defined by the railway line, whilst the eastern side is mostly made up of more recent housing developments.

The modern centre of Wigston is focussed around The Lanes - a remnant of the old Medieval field system.

5.3 The Conservation Area is centred on All Saints' Church which sits on slightly raised ground so that approaching from the east along Moat Street, it is visible from some distance. Newgate End to the south also rises towards the church, a clear view of which is gained from outside the school gates.

5.4 Moving south towards the church down Long Street, the land falls slightly and the enclosure created by the buildings on the back of the footpath draws the eye towards the church and the trees within its churchyard.

5.5 Approaching the area from the west through Bushloe End, the aspect is much more open. Bushloe End marks what was one of the western boundaries of the inhabited village and was the village exit to Blaby. And although, development has occurred between Blaby and Wigston (most notably South Wigston), these settlements are still separated by some open land, hinting at how the village of Wigston must have originally looked.

5.6 The Wigston All Saints Conservation Area forms a southern 'extension' to the Wigston The Lanes Conservation Area. The All Saints Conservation Area is designated separately as its character is markedly different from that of 'The Lanes'.

6.0 Townscape Analysis

Bushloe End (North side)

6.1 Bushloe End is a short stretch of road connecting Moat Street to the east and Station Road to the west. The street's name is all that remains from the former name of Moat Street, Bussclow, one of the oldest street names recorded in Wigston Magna.

6.2 Starting from the western end of the north side of the street, the first properties within the Conservation Area are Nos. 42-44 which are Grade II* Listed and form the Wigston Framework Knitters Museum. Nos. 42-44 were a master hosier's house and shop, formed from a pair of late C17 cottages, raised in the late C18 with a mid C19 rear extension. They are 3 storeys and of red brick with dark chequering to the ground floor and diaper work at the first floor. They have a granite plinth and a Welsh slate roof. No. 44 has a mid C19 shopfront and the other windows of the properties are horizontal sliding sashes. To the rear of these buildings is a late C19, 2 storey, stocking weaving workshop of brick with a Welsh slate roof. This building has the long windows of many lights on each storey that are indicative of its use as a knitting workshop.

6.3 Adjacent to the museum is The Plough Public House, a 2 storey building with a tiled roof and half-timbering above a red brick ground floor. The present building which was built in the late 1920s after the demolition of the previous inn has 'Arts and Crafts' detailing. Records indicated that an inn of the same name has been trading in this location since at least the mid-C19.

6.4 Across an unattractive open area adjacent to The Plough is a C19 coach house of 1.5 storeys with brick walls and a slate roof. It sits hard on the back of the footpath, gable end onto the street. It sits in the forecourt of a modern GPs surgery,

No. 48 Bushloe End, although it probably once served Kingswood Lodge. It is a Significant Local Building.

6.5 A good red brick wall forms the boundary of No. 50 Bushloe End, Kingswood Lodge, a two storey property with a late C19 appearance, but earlier origins. It is a Significant Local Building and has rendered brick walls with a slate roof. It is obscured from view by a screen of trees behind the boundary wall.

Bushloe End (south side)

6.6 Crossing over to the other side of the road, a short stretch of hedge forms the boundary of the school grounds. Next west is the building known locally as the Church Rooms which opened in 1929. It is a single storey building of red brick with a slate roof and is built on or near the spot where the previous vicarages for All Saints' Church stood.

6.7 The present vicarage was built in 1909 and is a 2 storey red brick building with a slate roof. It sits a little back from the footpath, gable end on, behind a low red brick garden wall. Its substantial chimneys add variety and interest to the skyline.

6.8 The oldest part of the British Legion complex is a 3 storey double fronted Georgian building which is designated a Significant Local Building. It was previously known as 'The Elms' (built in 1752) and has painted brick work walls and a Welsh slate roof. The rest of the British Legion complex is a single storey brown brick flat-roofed C20 extension. It contrasts sharply with the traditional features of the original building and presents an unattractive blank façade to both Bushloe End and Launceston Road elevations.

6.9 Bushloe End opens up at this point due to the square green space on the other side of the Launceston Road junction. It is a well treed space and provides an attractive, more natural counterfoil to the urban feel of its surroundings.

Long Street (east side)

6.10 Only Nos. 5-17A Long Street, a C19 terrace, are within the Conservation Area boundary - the rest of the street falls within the boundary of the 'Wigston The Lanes Conservation Area'. Looking south along the street, the Church of All Saints rises above the skyline of this C19 terrace and is the dominant feature.

6.11 Although the entire terrace is of two storeys, it is of three building periods. Nos. 17 & 17A are C20 rebuilds on the site of The Durham Ox Inn and No. 17A has a modern shopfront. Nos. 11A-15 are later and of a larger scale than Nos. 5-11, but all date from the C19 and are of red brick with slate roofs. Their chimneys create rhythm at the skyline and lead the eye towards the steeple of All Saints' Church.

Long Street (west side)

6.12 This side of the street is almost entirely taken up by the modern 2 storey housing development, Kingswood Court. In contrast to the red brick of the modern houses, Nos. 1-2 Kingswood Court on the northern side of the entrance to residential complex is of white render. It is also of 2 storeys and dates from the early C20. Kingswood Court adjoins Kingswood Lodge, No. 50 Bushloe End. The good brick boundary wall of Kingswood Lodge turns the corner into Bushloe End.

Blunts Lane (south side)

6.13 The short stretch of Blunts Lane that falls within this Conservation Area is mostly taken up by Bushloe Court, a modern housing development. Moving east, Nos. 17-19 Blunts Lane are three modern dwellings before the rear boundary of The Old Crown Public House on Moat Street is reached. There is an access gate to the public house through the boundary fence. Beyond this, the lane narrows to become more of a footpath.

Moat Street (north side)

6.14 Moat Street is essentially a continuation of Bushloe End and runs slightly downhill towards its junction with Bull Head Street. It is one side of the rectangular road system that marked the boundary of the original abandoned settlement.

6.15 The brick boundary wall of No. 5 Long Street turns the corner into Moat Street. A C20 bungalow (No. 16) sits behind a timber fence and the next property east is No. 18 a detached C20 house with an open frontage.

6.16 No. 32 Moat Street sits on the back of the footpath and its flank gable is prominent in views east from the road's junction with Bushloe End. No. 32 is a C19 white rendered 2 storey property with a slate roof. Its name, Cromwell Cottage, is possibly a reference to the fact that Oliver Cromwell is reputed to have stayed in a moated homestead that was located nearby.

6.17 Nos. 38-44 are two pairs of 1.5 storey C20 houses, set back from the road behind open front gardens. The next property east is The Old Crown Public House which is set back from the road in a raised position. It dates from the early C19, is of rendered brick with a slate roof and is a Significant Local Building. A side access leads to the uninviting open tarmac area to the rear of the public house. Moving east, Nos. 48-50 & 60 are two modern detached dwellings.

Moat Street (south side)

6.18 Looking west from this point, the spire of All Saints' Church is highly prominent and provides a good focal point to the area. Nos. 17-21 (odds) are all modern dwellings, but Nos. 9-11 dates from before 1885. This is a white painted brick building with a slate roof and a sadly truncated chimney. A narrow passageway, runs off the main street between this property and its neighbour, Nos. 5-7. A traditional sign with the name 'Barrack Yard' is attached to the flank walls of Nos. 9-11.

6.19 Nos. 5-7, originally a pair of mid C19 properties, are also of white painted brick with a slate roof and a shopfront on the western side of the street elevation. To the rear (and visible from the west side) is a 2 storey knitting shed with the characteristic long windows still in evidence. It is a Significant Local Building.

6.20 No. 3 Moat Street is a modern dwelling set back from the road behind an open front garden. No. 1a is red brick 2 storey C19 house with slate roof and a boundary wall that turns the corner into and adjoins No. 2 Newgate End. Because of the openness of this junction, the flank wall of the property is visible in views east from Bushloe End.

6.21 Across the junction with Newgate End, is the Church of All Saints which is Grade I Listed. It dates largely from the early C14 with C15 features and was conservatively restored in 1863-4 by C. Kirk. It is of granite and limestone rubble

with limestone ashlar dressings and leaded roofs. It is an extremely prominent building and a local landmark, both visually and historically. It is screened on its northern and western boundaries by mature lime trees.

Newgate End (east side)

6.22 Turning into Newgate End from the busy Moat Street, the change in character is striking. Newgate End has an almost rural feel and is much older in terms of built fabric than most of its surroundings.

6.23 No. 2 Newgate End is a Grade II Listed 2 storey house dating from the early C19 and is of red brick with a Swithland slate roof. It sits hard on the back of the footway and has added presence because of its gable end stacks. A good round headed stair window with margin lights is visible in its southern gable.

6.24 A fine brick boundary wall follows the curve in the road. Behind this in the grounds of No. 10, some stables and other small outbuildings are visible. The boundary wall is only broken by the access to No. 10 Newgate End, a Grade II Listed farmhouse built in 1691, with alterations in the C18 and C19. It is a brick built property with a Welsh slate roof and is well set back at the end of a hard landscaped drive.

6.25 Forming the southern boundary of No. 10 and sitting gable end on to the street, is a red brick 1.5 storey hayloft with diamond patterned ventilation holes enlivening the street elevation. Looking south towards Gas Lane, the view is picturesque with mature trees providing an attractive green backcloth to the older properties, although parked cars intrude into this scene.

6.26 No. 18 contrasts with the Listed red brick properties as it is a C20 white rendered property with an open front garden. A sense of enclosure is restored with the row of mature trees that forms the property's southern boundary and marks the dog-leg bend in the road.

6.27 On the north side of this dog-leg bend is a pair of rendered C19 cottages, Nos. 34 & 36. They are both of 2 storeys and have attractive detailing at their cornices. No. 36, Church Spire Cottage, is of a much smaller scale than No. 34 and adjacent is No. 38, an altered later property. All retain their chimneys, but have unfortunate replacement uPVC windows.

Newgate End (west side)

6.28 Crossing over the south side of the dog leg bend in Newgate End, Nos. 5-9 are C20 bungalows, and then, sitting gable end on to the street is No. 3, Yew Tree House. This is an early C19 property of 2 storeys and painted brick with a Welsh slate roof. It has several mature trees in its garden bordering Gas Lane.

6.29 Returning to the main stretch of Newgate End, a good brick boundary wall (Grade II Listed) encloses the garden to the Manor House a Grade II Listed C18 property. It is of 3 storeys with brick walls and a Welsh slate roof. The early C20 lower rear wing is visible above the boundary wall and through the Grade II Listed gate piers to the north of the main property. The rear wing is also of brick, but with a Swithland slate roof and is in a vernacular revival style.

6.30 The boundary wall continues north until the grounds of Birkett House School are reached. This access to the school is littered with ugly portacabins and parked cars which mar the clearest views of All Saints' Church.

6.31 The remaining stretch of the road before it rejoins Moat Street is bordered by the churchyard's granite boundary wall which has a plaque commemorating its construction in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year, 1897. Iron railings originally surmounted the wall, but these were removed during the Second World War.

Gas Lane

6.32 This is essentially a southern continuation of Newgate End and was known as such until it became known as Gas Lane because of the gas works that were located at the bottom of the lane. (The works were demolished after the Second World War.) The lane is rather unkempt, but enclosed by hedges and mature trees and now leads to a C20 housing estate (The Little Hill Estate) where it becomes Pochin's Close. There are no buildings fronting onto the lane and only the outbuildings belonging to Yew Tree House are really noticeable.

Launceston Road (east side)

6.33 This street runs north-south from Moat Street into The Little Hill Estate. Only the east side is within the Conservation Area and contains an assortment of buildings including the C20 Menphys Centre, a nursery for children aged 2-5 years with special educational needs which is linked to the C20 Birkett House Community Special School. These buildings were built in the grounds of the Rectory Farm.

6.34 The curtilage of the Manor House on Newgate End extends westwards to Launceston Road where it forms part of the western boundary of the Conservation Area. The survival of this orchard together with the substantial trees that that been retained around the Menphys Centre contributes to the semi-rural character of this part of the Conservation Area.

6.35 The rear yard of the British Legion complex in contrast is an unattractive tarmac hard area of parking with the original Georgian building engulfed by its C20 extensions. To the south is another entrance to the Birkett Head School, a 2 storey block of brown brick construction.

7.0 Key Characteristics

7.1 Scale - Traditional properties vary between 2 and 3 storeys, although it tends to only be the grander houses that are of 3 storeys, e.g. the Manor House. The exception is 42/44 Bushloe End which is a modest property. Modern buildings are almost universally of 2 storeys, the exceptions being the Cedar Court Care Centre (3 storeys) and the small number of more modern single storey buildings.

7.2 Materials - Older properties are of the local red brick although some have later been rendered, e.g. No. 50 Bushloe End and Nos. 9-11 Moat Street. Modern properties tend to be constructed in a variety of bricks, e.g. buff and brown.

7.3 Position on Plot - Most traditional properties sit parallel to the street, close to or on the back of the footway. More modern properties also sit parallel to the street but, more often than not, are set back from the road behind front gardens or parking areas.

7.4 Detailing - Good traditional details such as sash windows and chimneystacks survive on many of the Listed and Significant Local Buildings. Unfortunately most other older properties have lost their original windows and often have replacement roofs too. A handful of properties have good small details such as the gable window of No. 2 Newgate End and the long windows of the framework knitters' properties.

7.5 Trees - Large mature trees surround many of the older properties and are a particular feature of the Newgate End area where many of them are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. These provide a pleasant green back-cloth around the church and help to retain a village-like character in Newgate End.

7.6 Boundaries - Good boundary walls are characteristic of Newgate End where they enclose the often large plots of the traditional properties. With the exception of No. 50 Bushloe End, they are not much in evidence elsewhere within the Conservation Area.

7.7 Views - The key views in the area are those of All Saints' Church. These are particularly important along Moat Street and, to a lesser extent, Long Street.

8.0 Changes to the Conservation Area Boundary in January 2007

8.1 The following changes to the Conservation Area boundary were made following this appraisal to help reinforce the special architectural or historic interest of the area. These changes are effective from 15 January 2007.

Removals

8.2 Pochin's Close is part of a C20 housing development which does not contribute positively to the setting of the Conservation Area, even though some of the existing mature trees have been retained. Similarly, the modern eastern end of Newgate End and Nos. 17-21 (odds) Moat Street are all C20 buildings which contribute nothing to the character of the Conservation Area. Pochin's Close with the exception of Gas Lane and The Bungalow (the former Gasworks Offices) and the modern eastern end of Newgate End and Nos. 17-21 (odds) Moat Street have therefore been excluded from the Conservation Area boundary. The mature trees within Pochin's Close can be protected by Tree Preservation Orders if they are felt to be of townscape value.

9.0 Enhancement Opportunities

9.1 The removal of the portacabins and parking, but especially the portacabins, from the Newgate End entrance to Birkett Head School would vastly improve the setting of All Saints' Church, an extremely important building in the locality.

9.2 The single storey wing of the British Legion complex on the corner of Bushloe End and Launceston Road is a weak feature and provides no definition to this corner. Redevelopment of, or building up from, this single storey wing in a style more sympathetic to the Georgian building would significantly enhance this corner. The car park to the rear could also be better developed, but at the very least, some planting and screening of this area would minimise the impact of the complex's rear ranges on the streetscape and complement the attractive green space on the opposite side of the road.

9.3 Similarly the parking / garden areas of the two pubs in the Conservation Area - The Plough and The Old Crown - could be improved with either better hard landscaping or the introduction of some soft landscaping elements to 'green' the areas.

9.4 Gas Lane's informal and rural character is derived from its unadopted feel. Its unmetalled surface, however, is liable to flood and has a rather unkempt appearance. Appropriate resurfacing in an informal material would improve the appearance and functionality of the lane.

9.5 The Borough Council may seek to make 'Article 4 Directions' to retain traditional detailing on the exterior of non-listed buildings within the Conservation Area, where such details have not already been lost.

9.6 'Shire Historic Buildings Grants' and specialist technical advice are available from Leicestershire County Council for essential repairs or the restoration of original architectural features to certain historic buildings and structures. Applications are currently assessed against the following criteria:

- ownership and property type
- status of building
- types of repairs
- community benefit

Contact: The Conservation Officer, Heritage Resources,
tel: 0116 2657082, www.leics.gov.uk/shire

10. References

Colver J, 'Wigston Magna: It's Buildings Extant, Altered or Demolished', Wigston Framework Knitters Museum: Leicestershire, 2001

Garner J.T. 'Prince Wigstan's Legacy', Two-Steeples Press: Wigston, 2004

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Oadby & Wigston Adopted Local Plan (29 October 1999)