



Midland Cottages Conservation Area Appraisal and Development Control Guidance

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Contents

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	What are Conservation Areas?	2
3.0	Overview of the area	3
4.0	Brief history / archaeology	4
5.0	Setting	6
6.0	Townscape analysis	7
7.0	Key characteristics	11
8.0	Enhancement opportunities	12
9.0	Development Control Guidance	14
10.0	References	17

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Midland Cottages Conservation Area was first designated in 1989. This document aims to fulfil 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. Development Control Guidance for the area is included at the end of 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 copy of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Development Control Guidelines was distributed to all properties within the Conservation Area and those immediately surrounding it.
 - A copy of the documents was also distributed to key stakeholders.
 - A public exhibition was staged in the Bassett Street Centre on Tuesday 7th March 2006 between 12.30pm - 8.00pm.
 - A 'Report of Consutation' was prepared and is available from the Borough Council.
- 1.3 This document is a Supplementary Planning Document which replaces any previously produced Supplementary Planning Guidance for the area.

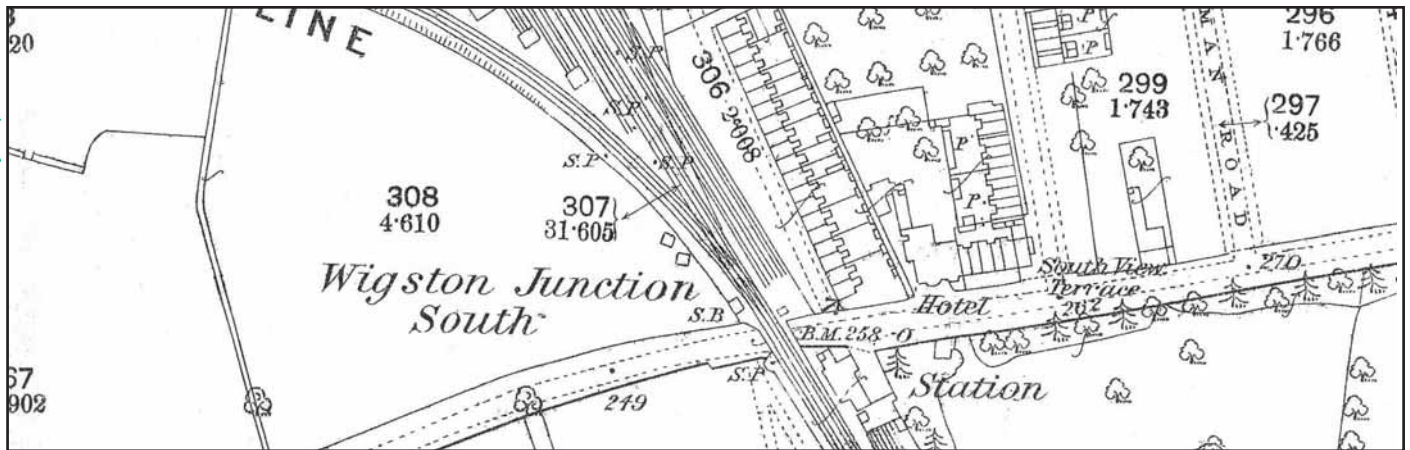
2.0 What are Conservation Areas?

- 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.



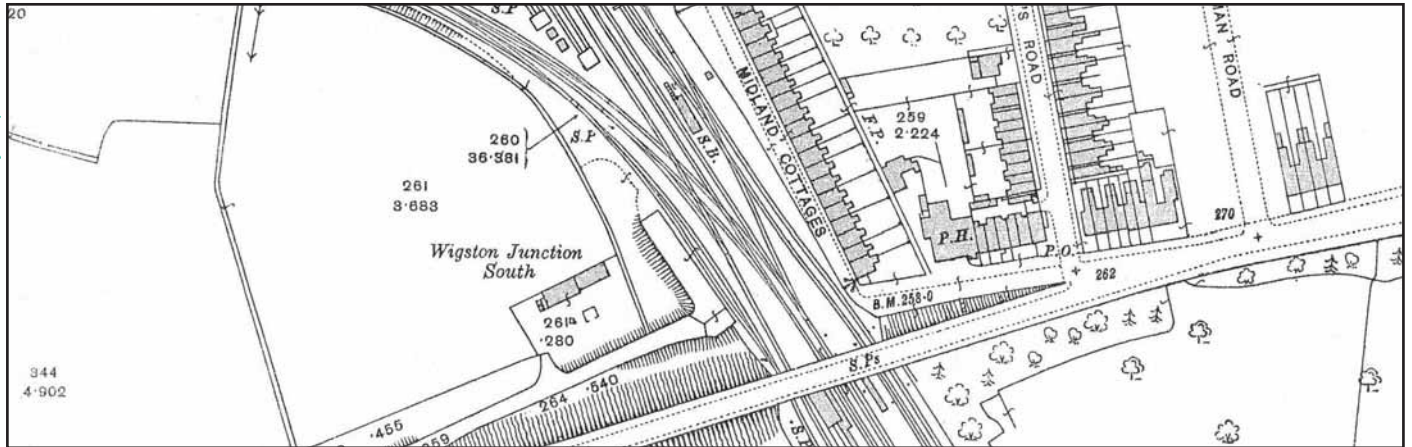
3.0 Overview of the area

- 3.1 The Midland Cottages Conservation Area is a small area containing a row of twenty former railway workers cottages together with the former Railway Hotel. The buildings were all built between 1871 and 1881 and are of virtually identical materials. Although the Railway Hotel is a much more imposing building, like the cottages it is of two storeys and sits on what was the road which crossed the railway line at a level crossing. The erection of a new road bridge in the first years of the C20 means that today the buildings sit at the bottom of the embankment carrying the new road.
- 3.2 The cottages and former hotel have considerable architectural and historic interest, though the character of the former has been reduced in recent years due to incremental alterations made to the individual properties. Whilst these could be considered minor in themselves, the cumulative effect has been to rob the terrace of its homogenous feel. The reinstatement of lost features and the removal of paint and cladding from the properties offers a great opportunity to restore the character of the terrace. The former hotel is remarkably well preserved and continues to serve local people as a public house.
- 3.3 The embankment effectively defines the southern boundary of the Conservation Area, whilst the railway line demarcates the western boundary. To the east are houses, whilst to the north stand modern houses and industrial concerns.
- 3.4 Not surprisingly, the setting is very urban and there is little greenery other than that which has colonised the railway line and embankment and the occasional garden tree. However the track in front of the cottages and the forecourt of the public house in particular offer great opportunities for enhancing the character of the area. Improvements to the railway land opposite the cottages would also be a tremendous benefit to the setting and outlook of the cottages.



4.0 Brief history / archaeology

- 4.1 The development of the railway network was one of the most significant events of the Victorian era. Its impacts touched upon almost every aspect of Victorian life. The railways were a great stimulus to economic growth partly because they enabled goods to be transported easily. They also gave employment, directly and indirectly to a huge number of people.
- 4.2 The larger railway companies quickly saw the advantages of providing houses as a means of securing high quality staff. In 1861, the Board of the Great Northern Railway, for example, was told that 'the value to the Company of having their servants comfortably located and near to their work must be great, as it must improve the class of servants working for us'. The Metropolitan Railway reported similar benefits to both the railway and the workmen in 1885.
- 4.3 The provision of housing was a sound business investment for the railway companies. Rents could be taken directly from the occupier's wages and the likelihood of recalcitrance amongst employees was reduced when they knew that they could be threatened with eviction. More positively, the workmen benefited from well-built, sanitary accommodation which improved the employee's health (and consequently their reliability and attendance). Such housing also displayed the Company's wealth, prestige and philanthropy to all.
- 4.4 The Midland Railway, formed in 1833, was one of the largest providers of housing. The houses that they built were often to a standard pattern with easy to transport bricks for the walls and Welsh slate for the roofs. Replicas of the Midland Cottages in South Wigston can be found in Bradford, for example, where a terrace of forty houses was built by 1880. Even the red bricks for the walls are virtually identically which means that whilst the South Wigston cottages sit comfortably with neighbouring houses, those in Bradford stand out in a city built of Yorkshire stone.



- 4.5 The South Wigston Midland Railway Cottages were built between 1871 and 1881 at an important point on the railway network where the loop line from Glen Parva met the main line to Market Harborough and London. Wigston Magna Railway Station, which opened in 1857, stood to the south of the cottages across Station Road. Originally Station Road crossed the railway line at a level crossing next to the cottages and the hotel. In 1901 this all changed with the construction of the Spion Kop bridge, named after the Boer War battle in that year. This meant that the hotel was effectively by-passed with a steep embankment between the old and new roads.
- 4.6 The 1885 Ordnance Survey map reveals that to the north of the cottages stood a large house, possibly for the station master. The hotel at the rear had a U-shaped wing, possibly stables whilst to the north of it was a large area of orchards. Clarke's Road to the east had already been laid out and various houses lined it.
- 4.7 By 1891, the Midland Cottages were occupied by train drivers, who were considered to be the elite of the railway's workforce together with other railway workers. Many other houses in the streets behind the Midland Cottages were also occupied by railway workers and the area must have been something of a 'railway village'.
- 4.8 The railway station closed in 1968 and several of the sidings have been abandoned. The cottages continue to look across the railway lines though a large railing encloses the railway. The other changes include the various alterations made to the cottages, the renaming of the Railway Hotel to 'The 1852 Brewery Co.' and the removal of the steps down from the bridge opposite the old Railway Hotel.

5.0 Setting

- 5.1 The Midland Cottages Conservation Area sits close to Station Road in Wigston. Immediately to the east is housing, the majority of which is terraced, red brick and dates from the late C19. There are also some more modern houses of similar materials. To the north are mostly industrial premises and employment uses whilst to the south, on the opposite side of the Station Road embankment is Guthlaxton Community College, its playing fields, a library and swimming pool.
- 5.2 The front elevation of the cottages faces west and looks across the railway line. Beyond are factories and warehousing with the shops and amenities of South Wigston around half a mile west of the cottages.