

Oadby North Memorial Homes & Framework Knitters Cottages Conservation Area Appraisal

December 2007

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Oadby North Memorial Homes and Framework Knitters Cottages Conservation Area was first designated in 1988. 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 'Management Plan' for the Oadby North Memorial Homes and Framework Knitters Cottages Conservation Area which has been produced to accompany this appraisal.

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

- A letter was issued to properties in the Conservation Area and immediately outside the current boundary from the 24 September 2007. The consultation period finished on 22 October 2007.
- A letter was also distributed to key stakeholders.

1.3 The land and properties within the Conservation Area are almost entirely in the ownership boundary of the North Memorial Homes and the Framework Knitters Cottages. These organisations are both social housing providers and the properties are managed by Boards of Trustees. The Boards of both organisations were approached about holding an exhibition, but they did not feel that this was appropriate. Instead, the Boards were provided with copies of the draft appraisal which they discussed at their Trustee meetings. During the period of public consultation, they were again given the opportunity to comment on the document.

1.4 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 The Conservation Area comprises two sets of well-maintained 'open plan' almshouses which sit opposite each other east and west of Stoughton Drive. Although both were built in the early C20 of red brick with clay tiled roofs, both comprise homes set within attractive well-kept grounds and both are accessed from the road through private gateways, the character of the two groups is rather different.

3.2 The Framework Knitters Cottages are all single storey. They are quite informally arranged around an open lawn and gardens and have cottages which directly face Stoughton Drive. More recently-built cottages stand to the south of the site and effectively create informal courts. The earliest cottages date from 1909; the most recent from 2000, though others are currently under construction. The general forms of the cottages are similar with hipped roofs and tile hung gables but there are considerable differences in detailing particularly between the earlier and more recent cottages. The cottages are built as pairs or small groups of three. Two communal buildings, Corah Hall and Corah House face each other across the green. The former is part of the original foundation and is designed to be a feature building; the latter is modern and takes the general form of the cottages.

3.3 The North Memorial Homes are all two storey pairs some of which have been split horizontally to form flats. They are quite formally arranged around the central gardens and are well screened from Stoughton Drive. All the houses were built in 1927 and at first sight are virtually identical. Closer inspection reveals that there are two predominant building types, with only one pair, which is effectively the focus of the main view east, being a slight variation. All the pairs have sweeping roofs with central chimney stacks, verandahs, gables (some hipped) and some have hipped roof dormers. The former Memorial Hall, which occupies a quite grand setting on the western boundary, is now leased to the Evangelical Church and is in a restrained Neo-Georgian style as opposed to the Vernacular Revival style of the cottages.

3.4 Both groups of houses sit within attractive grounds mostly laid to lawn but with flower and shrub beds. The majority of mature trees in the Framework Knitters site are along the boundaries; the major exception being the Canadian oak behind the main gate. Trees in the North Memorial Homes site are especially prevalent to the west of the site, and on the east and south boundaries with some trees strategically placed within the gardens.

3.5 Cars are restricted to the area in front of the Evangelical Church on the North Memorial Homes site. This allows the majority of the gardens to be kept free from vehicles as all the houses have rear access lanes. Vehicles can drive around the edge of the gardens on the Framework Knitters site, though the car parking area is well-screened and vehicles rarely interrupt the attractive setting of the cottages. The streetlights on the Knitters site are of the traditional lantern type and complement their setting. Although the lights on the North Memorial Homes site are modern, the columns are painted dark green and the style is not intrusive.

4.0 Brief History / Archaeology

4.1 In 1906, the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters sold off its almshouses in London to pay for the erection of 20 cottage homes in Oadby on land which had been gifted to the Company. By 1909 a number of cottages and a hall had been completed facing Stoughton Road and in the northern part of the site: several were sponsored by local manufacturing companies.

4.2 Two more cottages were added in 1925 south of the central green. In 1927, HRH The Prince of Wales planted a Canadian Oak tree which continues to flourish. In 1980 several homes were refurbished and in 1990 Corah House was built to provide flats and communal facilities following bequests from the J R Corah Foundation. The same foundation financed the attached Corah Cottages in 2000. The pair of cottages facing these in the southwest corner of the site was built in 1995.

4.3 In recent years, some of the older almshouses have been extended and refurbished in a style which complements the original surviving buildings. In 2005, work began on replacing the cottages facing the road and providing a wider vehicle gate on the north east part of the site. The sale of the former allotments on the west of the site to allow for the construction of new houses has facilitated some of the more recent building projects.

4.4 The North Memorial Homes were opened in 1927 by the Prince of Wales. They were built to house servicemen wounded in the Great War and were financed by Alderman Sir Jonathan North who had been the Mayor of Leicester throughout the conflict. Leicester architect Trevor Sawday designed the buildings in an attractive 'garden suburb' style.

4.5 Although the houses have been modernised, the homes and their very attractive setting remain little altered. The Memorial Hall is now leased to the Oadby Evangelical Church and a bungalow has been built in the southwest corner of the site (severing the oak tree planted by the Duke of York from the rest of the site). However the impact of these has been insignificant compared to the beneficial effects of the maturing trees and landscape around the site.

5.0 Setting

5.1 The Conservation Area is around 400 metres due north of the A6 and some 3.5 miles from Leicester City Centre. The main centre of Oadby town is around 650 metres to the southeast. Stoughton Drive, which bisects the area, is a reasonably busy 'B' road linking the A6 to Gartree Road which follows the line of the old Roman Road.

5.2 When the Framework Knitters Cottages were built, Stoughton Road was just beginning to be developed and New Lane (as it was then called) was just a track. By the time the North Memorial Homes were built, more development had taken place but there were still large areas of open land together with some very substantial houses south of what is now Stoughton Close. In the second half of the C20, a number of new houses

were built and the large houses on their huge plots demolished. Today the two sets of almshouses are something of an enclave within a built up residential area.

5.3 The northern leg of Stoughton Drive is generally characterised by quite large detached properties in generous plots. These tend to be set back within their plots and the presence of trees, shrubs and hedges gives the road a pleasant suburban feel. The wealth of trees, particularly those forming the western boundary of the North Memorial Homes, add considerably to the townscape interest of this part of the road.

5.4 The gates into the Cottages and Memorial Homes respectively add to the sense of them being private enclaves separated from the road. This is particularly the case for the North Memorial Homes where the dense tree boundary makes it virtually impossible to see the individual houses. The Framework Knitters Cottages are more visible with the steeply-pitched roofs visible over the hedge which defines the side of the road.

6.0 Townscape Analysis

Framework Knitters Cottage Homes

6.1 The entrance to the site is through an attractive C19 gateway commemorating the founding of the Cottage Homes. This takes the form of a 'triumphal arch' with a large central carriage entrance with smaller flanking pedestrian gates. The structure is of red brick with stone dressings and copings with a central cartouche and commemorative plaque beneath. To the side are walls and railings, whilst behind, the Canadian Oak planted in 1927, is now an imposing and attractive backcloth.

6.2 To the south of the gateway are Nos. 1-5 a group of three cottages, then a separate pair of cottages all built to a consistent building line, and forming the south east edge of the site behind, a substantial hedge. The block of three has a large gable to the north end with a smaller gable to the south; the pair of cottages has two smaller gables. All the cottages are of red brick laid in English Bond with sweeping red-brown clay tiled roofs and ridge stacks. The windows are all modern multi-paned timber casements with tile crease drips above. The faces of the gables are tile-hung with white-painted bargeboards. The cottages were rebuilt c. 2004.

6.3 Behind Nos. 1-5, and typically of the group separated by well-maintained lawns, is Corah House. This was built in 1990 and reads from the east as a pair of parallel single-storey red-brick ranges. The roofs are hipped and covered with red plain tiles. A small gable marks the front entrance, whilst a rather heavy lead canopy announces the east entrance. A lower range, containing two cottages, attaches to the west end. The form, proportions and materials of the building respect the detailing of the earlier cottages; only the stained timber windows and blocky canopy strike discordant notes. The building contains a communal room and offices in the front range, with two pairs of cottages in each of the south and west wings.

6.4 Adjoining Corah House to the south are Corah Cottages. This pair of cottages has the same form as Corah House despite being built ten years later. The windows, which include some oriels, are again three-light stained timber casements. These cottages replaced a pair of Y-shaped dwellings which were built as part of the original foundation.

6.5 Facing Corah Cottages (Nos. 18 & 19) to the west are Nos. 23-25. These were probably built in the late 1950s but were restored and extended in 1995. The red clay tiled roof sweeps down at the ends over large bow windows with paired multi-paned casements between. The roofs are hipped with large ridge stacks at each end. Side extensions, following the slope of the roof but with rendered walls have improved the standard of the accommodation.

6.6 Nos. 20 & 21 stand to the north of No. 23 and their rear elevation neatly encloses the space between these cottages and Nos. 18 & 19. Nos. 20 & 21 were built in 1925 and the rear elevation is of red brick with a nicely weathered clay tiled roof with a pair of ridge stacks. The three light casement windows have moulded surrounds. The front elevation of these cottages has a more unique character with 'half timbering' to the recessed central part which contains the doors, bay windows and a date plaque. The red brick wings, which have hipped roofs, project slightly and add to the picturesque composition.

6.7 Opposite Nos. 20 & 21, across the lawn, are Nos. 16 & 17. These were built in 1911-12 and sponsored by the 'Employees of Donisthorpe', a fact commemorated on the lead hopper. Again this is a very attractive design with paired central gables with a bold red brick chimney stack behind. The hipped side wings are slightly lower and step down gently from the main roof. To the rear is a backcloth of mature trees on the north boundary of the site.

6.8 Tucked to the side of the cottages is the car park. This is quite well screened from the main garden area and does not intrude into the many attractive views from the central garden area. The land to the west, which had been used as allotments for the residents, was sold off in the 1990s and now contains five modern houses. These are quite well hidden behind a timber fence, hedge and tree line.

6.9 Corah Hall was the centrepiece of the original foundation. It is a very attractive single storey red brick building with a large central gable and smaller flanking wings. The weathered clay tile roof has an attractive lead cupola with appropriate weather-vane and a small end stack on the north gable. The central half-round window is in a loose 'Arts and Crafts' style with leaded windows and tile creasing details. A commemorative stone forms part of the window sill.

6.10 Nos. 12-15 are two identical pairs of cottages which were part of the original foundation. Like Nos. 16 & 17, they have paired gables and a central ridge stack on the hipped main roof. The red brick walls have diaper patterns of vitrified headers whilst the faces of the gables are tile hung. Stones beneath the gable valleys record that the cottages were built with the support of local clothing manufacturers.

6.11 Facing Stoughton Road, No.6, which was originally a warden's cottage and had a roughly 'butterfly' plan, Nos. 7-9, a block of three cottages with a large central gable and a pair, and Nos. 10 & 11, were part of the original foundation. At the time of survey, these have been demolished and will be replaced by a new vehicle entrance gate and blocks of three and two cottages. The proposed replacement cottages will be of red brick laid in English Bond with hipped clay tiled roofs and tile hanging to the gables. The gateway will have brick flank walls topped by railings and steel gates. The cottages and

gates have been designed by 'architects LE1' and will balance the composition to Stoughton Road by effectively being a mirror image of Nos. 1-5.

6.12 Despite the various ages of the cottages, the similarities of form and materials produces a very attractive composition whilst the variations in detailing between the cottages adds interest to the general townscape. The pleasant open-plan lawns and well-maintained garden areas, together with the Canadian Oak in particular and other trees along the site boundary, contribute significantly to the picturesque group and produce the feel of a quiet enclave protected from the busy road. The traditional column-mounted lanterns add to the general atmosphere and are an attractive feature in their own right. Whilst some of the 'black-top' paths are rather urban in appearance, the need to provide smooth, trip-free surfaces is recognised.

6.13 The modern houses to the west of the site have been built on the site of the former allotments. The new houses are screened from rather than contributing to the character of the cottage homes and it is therefore sensible to now remove this area from the Conservation Area.

North Memorial Homes

6.14 From Stoughton Road, the North Memorial Homes are barely visible due to the presence of a substantial tree and hedge screen along the western boundary of the site. A slip road is separated from the main road by a grass verge which contains more trees and hedges and adds to the bosky character.

6.15 The entrance to the homes is via a relatively simple gateway in the form of a lych-gate. This is of red and blue brick with a hipped clay tiled roof. On the southern pier is a bronze tablet marking the foundation of the homes and the opening ceremony which was performed by the Prince of Wales in 1927.

6.16 In the middle of the western side of the site, is the Oadby Evangelical Church in what was the North Memorial Hall. The Church began worship in the building in 1974. The red brick building is in a restrained Neo-Georgian style and is raised above the gardens with a brick and tile balustrade above a stone wall and steps. The paired entrance doors have a stone surround, and on either side are a pair of multi-paned PVCu windows. These are set in a recessed panel with vestigial buttresses. The clay tiled roof is hipped, but has a parapet with a raised central portion and beneath it, a wreath set on a slightly pronounced panel. On either side were hipped-roofed porches. A modern extension, of brick with a tiled roof, has been added to the south.

6.17 The site of the North Memorial Homes is a tapering open-plan rectangle, wider at its west end than its east. The central garden is triangular and the ten pairs of houses are arranged along the north, south and east boundaries with the houses in the middle of the north and south boundaries staggered around smaller gardens flanking the main space. The focus of the principal view east is Nos. 11 & 12 which are the only houses on the eastern boundary. These houses are of a slightly different design to the others on the site.

6.18 Whilst the house designs are very similar and of identical scale and materials, there are essentially two basic block types, with only Nos. 11 & 12 being a variation on the theme. All the houses are a mixture of 1.5 and two storey elements with sweeping

red clay tiled roofs and prominent central ridge stacks. Many of the windows are still the original timber multi-paned casements. Some of the properties have been subdivided horizontally with the upstairs flats entered via doors with a sweeping tiled canopy with stairlight window set in the side elevations.

6.19 Nos. 1 & 2, 5 & 6, 9 & 10, 13 & 14 and 19 & 20 are of identical design. The front elevations have gables with hipped roofs. In between, the main roof sweeps down to form a verandah with French doors sheltered beneath. At first floor is a pair of hipped dormers. The ground floor windows in the end-pieces are 3-light casements with arched heads; the first floor windows are transomed and mullioned.

6.20 Nos. 3 & 4, 7 & 8, 15 & 16 and 17 & 18 are also identical. These have paired central gables with arched four-light windows at ground level and 3-light windows above. The roof sweeps down beside the gables to form canopies sheltering doors and windows beneath. Nos. 11 & 12 are effectively a variation on this design. The paired gables have hipped roofs and in the sweeping roofs beside are small hipped dormers. The gables each have a 4-light ground floor window with an arched head, but the 3-light window above is tucked right under the eaves.

6.21 The gardens and landscaping of the North Memorial Homes are a key aspect in defining the 'garden suburb' feel of the development. A tarmac circular area stands in front of what was the Memorial Hall and is used for parking. This is surrounded by extensive lawns and flower and shrub borders with several mature trees. A path leads out of the northeast corner of the site and is again lined by trees with more trees forming the eastern boundary of the site. A path runs roughly north south to the west of the circular forecourt of the former Hall. Beyond is a slightly sunken lawn now used as putting green. Past the flanking path to the north is a rectangular garden with flower beds in front of Nos. 3-8, whilst the corresponding garden to the south is dish-shaped. Steps and retaining walls emerge in the eastern point of the garden to join the path in front of Nos. 11 & 12. The east boundary is well supplied with mature trees, whilst other mature trees stand between Nos. 12 & 13, two between 16 & 17 and two in the centre of the garden. The overall impression is of a group of attractive houses sitting in a parkland setting. The effect is emphasised by the pots and hanging baskets of flowers outside several of the homes.

6.22 Mature trees form a backcloth to the homes on the east, west and south boundaries, although those to the south are outside the Conservation Area. Only the north boundary is rather more sparse with views between the homes of the houses on Woodfield Road. Access lanes run to the rear of the homes; that to the south is now Stoughton Close. The majority of the rear boundaries of the homes are formed by 2 metres high close-boarded fences.

6.23 The paths within the North Memorial Homes are generally tarmac; some of the more recent repairs are rather urban in appearance. The paths are lined by modern lighting columns painted dark green. Numerous seats are provided within the gardens.

7.0 Key Characteristics

7.1 *Framework Knitters Cottage Homes*

- A private enclave protected from the road by a hedge line and ceremonial gateway.
- Buildings informally arranged around the central gardens with smaller 'courts' to the south of the site. The grounds are all open plan with no individual private garden areas.
- Single storey buildings of red brick with sweeping pitched clay tiled roofs and often tile-hung gables.
- Buildings generally built as pairs of cottages or small groups of three.
- Corah Hall built as the focal point of the site with its gable to the central garden and an eye-catching cupola and weathervane.
- Differences in detailing even amongst the earlier buildings on the site.
- Multi-paned windows generally painted white (except for Corah House and Cottages).
- Modern extensions to cottages designed and positioned so as not to interfere with front / highly visible elevations.
- Well maintained gardens and lawns with trees along the north, south and west boundaries and the large Canadian Oak as a sentinel tree at the entrance to the site.
- Attractive street lights of a traditional design.
- When the cottages which are currently under construction are completed, the façade to Stoughton Road will be a balanced composition.

7.2 ***North Memorial Homes***

- A private enclave hidden from the road by a fine mature tree belt and ceremonial lych-gate.
- Buildings formally arranged around central gardens with circular parking area at west end. Open plan frontages.
- Two-storey homes built as pairs and some subdivided horizontally as well as vertically.
- Red brick walls with sweeping red clay tiled, pitched and hipped roofs with white-painted multi-paned windows.
- Two house designs; the only variation being the pair which forms the focal point of the view east.
- The former Memorial Hall is the focal point of the west elevation. The Neo-Georgian style is deliberately formal compared to the vernacular style of the houses. The building is only single storey but sits on a raised plinth to add gravitas.
- Large well maintained lawns with flower and shrub beds and no vehicular intrusion.
- Mature trees on the western end of the site shielding the homes from the road and providing a fine setting for the former Memorial Hall. Other strategically placed trees within central and flanking gardens.
- Tree belts along west, south and east boundaries of site.
- Modern, but appropriate street lighting and seats.

8.0 **Changes to the Conservation Area Boundary in January 2008**

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 14 January 2008.

8.2 The former allotments of the Framework Knitters Cottages have now been developed with modern bungalows. These are well-shielded from the rest of the site and do not intrude in views of the almshouses. However, their character is totally different and it is therefore proposed to now remove this area from the Conservation Area boundary.

8.3 A case could perhaps be made for including the trees along the south side of Stoughton Close which do provide a backcloth to views of Nos. 15-20 North Memorial Homes. However, it would be more sensible to consider serving a Tree Preservation Order on them if their amenity value and condition is felt to warrant such a designation.

9.0 Enhancement Opportunities

9.1 Both sites are exceptionally attractive and therefore management to ensure that the essential character is maintained is the key issue rather than redevelopment, repair or enhancement. The production of a management strategy which could be agreed with the Guardians of each group would be the most successful way of ensuring that the essential character of the Conservation Area could be maintained. This is the sister document to this appraisal.

9.2 The modern black-top surfacing to some of the paths on both sites has a rather urban appearance. Clearly, the surface needs to be smooth. However, if an aggregate or gravel could be bonded into the tarmac, this would soften the appearance of the paths whilst maintaining a trip-free surface.

10.0 References

- Thanks to Leicestershire Record Office for the supply of the 1914 and 1930 Ordnance Survey maps.
- Oadby & Wigston Adopted Local Plan (29 October 1999).
- Wills, D (Ed.) 'Oadby 2000', Oadby Local History Group: Leicestershire, (1999).
- The Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters, The Cottage Homes: Oadby, Leicestershire Leaflet (Jan. 2001).