

## 7.0 Key Characteristics

### *General townscape*

- 7.1 The powerful townscape character of the area is created by the linear streets of two-storey houses of similar style and building materials.
- 7.2 The streets have well-defined edges formed by the terraces with few breaks. Access to the rear is usually via narrow snickets with doors or occasionally ground floor carriage arches.
- 7.3 Often quite long vistas along streets are possible with vistas closed usually by modest-scaled buildings.
- 7.4 The Conservation Area has a very urban character with little greenery and few street trees (except where introduced to demarcate parking bays).
- 7.5 The industrial buildings and public buildings have a larger scale generally because of the larger floor-to-ceiling heights rather than because they have more floors. Most buildings are therefore only two storeys, occasionally with an additional attic storey.

### *Houses*

- 7.6 Two storey terraces of normally quite small red brick houses (occasionally of gault brick or with gault brick detailing) with either small front gardens or set right on the footpath edge.
- 7.7 The houses and other buildings are attractively detailed with bay windows, window and door surrounds and decorative eaves often formed by 'special' bricks.
- 7.8 Where they survive, original windows were generally sliding sashes with subdivided upper panes and plate glass lower panes. Some original shopfronts survive.

- 7.9 The similarity of detailing between the different blocks can be used as a way of crudely dating the terraces. These minor differences, rather than reducing the character of the area are in themselves an attractive feature of the houses.
- 7.10 A strong rhythm along the streets is created by the regular disposition of bays, window openings and chimneys.
- 7.11 Where they survive, original boundary walls are attractive features within the street.

### *Industrial and commercial buildings*

- 7.12 Blaby Road retains the majority of the shops and public buildings. Canal Street was the focus for the majority of the industrial buildings.
- 7.13 Shops and small commercial buildings are located on the street corners particularly along Canal Street with shops also found along Countesthorpe Road.
- 7.14 The small commercial buildings often produce an interesting juxtaposition of scale with the domestic terraced houses.
- 7.15 Many of the industrial buildings, although attractively detailed, are now derelict or underused.
- 7.16 Public buildings such as churches, chapels hotels and the one remaining school are attractive, well detailed and are major features within the streetscene
- 7.17 Blaby Road is exceptionally busy with traffic. Other streets are often dominated by parked cars and there have been problems of 'rat-running' which has meant that several streets are now one-way only.

## **8.0 Proposed Changes to the Conservation Area Boundary**

8.1 No changes to the Conservation Area boundary are proposed.

## 9.0 Enhancement Opportunities

### *Reinstatement of lost features*

- 9.1 Although several houses and shops in the area have been altered, others retain original features such as doors and windows whilst documentary evidence of the original appearance of buildings is good. Houses which have been little altered could be protected through 'Article 4 Directions' which would prevent unconsidered incremental changes. Similarly grant aid could be targeted at the repair of traditional features and also the reinstatement of lost features where this would make a significant improvement to the appearance of the building or group. Targeting grant aid to effectively restore key buildings to use as exemplars for reinstatement work may encourage other owners to restore lost features or encourage them to rethink proposals for change.
- 9.2 Although few original front boundary walls survive, once more there is good documentary evidence to guide reinstatement works. A programme of restoration, one street at a time would significantly improve the townscape quality of the streets.

### *Shopfronts*

- 9.3 There are a number of original surviving shopfronts within the Conservation Area. These should be retained. Similarly original elements may survive beneath later alterations. These should be retained in any proposals to alter shop facades and used as the basis for reinstating a more appropriate design. Encouragement should be given to the owners of shops with inappropriate frontages and signage to replace them with more suitable and traditional designs. Grant aid should be considered to ensure the survival of existing good examples and to improve design quality of the shopfronts on Blaby Road and in key buildings on other streets.

### ***Road and pavement surfacing***

- 9.4 Within the Conservation Area there are several types of surfacing including reinstatement in non-matching materials where roads have been widened or statutory undertakers have been active. This often looks messy and the lack of consistency undermines the homogeneous character of the majority of the buildings. Adopting a consistent surfacing material for both roads and pavements, and ensuring that reinstatement works are carried out in matching materials would enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area. A key area for enhancement would be Orange Street / Countesthorpe Road.

### ***Upgrading of street furniture***

- 9.5 Over the years several streets have accumulated a range of street furniture, some of which is dated, in poor condition, or not really necessary. An audit of the existing street furniture is required with a view to replacing, maintaining or removing any unnecessary items. Once again, greater consistency on choice of fixtures would benefit the area and early photographs could be used to choose designs appropriate to the history and heritage of the area.

### ***Replacement of overhead telegraph wires***

- 9.6 The view along several streets is currently disfigured by spider's webs of wires running from telegraph poles. Burying the wires would be a major improvement to the appearance of the streets. There is an opportunity for the Borough Council to discuss the potential for replacing overhead wires with the operating companies.

### *Site specific opportunities*

- 9.7 There are several key buildings on the streets of South Wigston which are identified on Map 3. Several of these are in poor condition, vacant or underused. Conversion of these buildings, retaining their appearance and reinstating lost features will be encouraged.
- 9.8 There are several vacant or underused sites in the area which do not make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. These are also marked on Map 3. In principal the reuse of these sites for housing or other suitable purposes should be encouraged where the design quality is of a sufficiently high standard.
- 9.9 Blaby Road is the main shopping street in South Wigston and is also the busiest transport route. In addition to supporting the reinstatement of shopfronts and other features of interest, shop forecourts should be enhanced and attempts made to introduce consistency of street furniture to give the street a strong identity.
- 9.10 A 'regeneration masterplan' has already been prepared for South Wigston and one of the agreed actions is the preparation of a 'town centre action plan'. This action plan should seek to ensure that improvement schemes enhance the appearance of the conservation area.
- 9.11 A scheme to provide better access and security to the rear of commercial premises along Blaby Road already exists. The design quality of the enclosures should be improved however to avoid unpainted galvanised security fences which have a harsh and hostile appearance when viewed from the surrounding residential streets.
- 9.12 Whilst the Local Plan seeks to retain commercial uses along Blaby Road, there are some groups which contain few shops. Where this is the case and there is the opportunity to significantly restore the appearance of terrace houses, consideration should be given to allowing these to be converted to domestic use.

- 9.13 Boundary enhancement and planting would significantly improve the appearance of a number of areas in South Wigston including the Dunton Street/Bassett Street car park, and the Countesthorpe Road car park. Similarly the Biscuit factory railings would be improved if they were painted rather than galvanised.
- 9.14 The Blaby Road Park is a major asset to the Conservation Area but has potential for enhancement. A detailed review could usefully be undertaken to develop proposals for implementation. The regeneration masterplan has already identified this as a specific proposal.

## 10.0 References

- W M Enterprise Consultants (2003), South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan
- Mastin P. (1997) South Wigston - The Early Years 1888-1913
- Mastin P. (1997) South Wigston - Between The Way 1914-1945