



6.0 Townscape analysis

- 6.1 The principal feature of the Conservation Area is the terrace of twenty identical houses of red brick with slate roofs built in the late C19 by the Midland Railway Company. They are built on the edge of the footpath facing the railway line at the front with rear gardens enclosed by tall red brick walls with blue saddleback copings. The rear access path is lined by highly vitrified pammetts. The two ends of the wall have been partly taken down and replaced by two pairs of flat-roofed garages.
- 6.2 As built the cottages, which were arranged as handed pairs, each had walls of red / brown bricks and Welsh slate roofs. At ground floor was an entrance door and tall paired sash windows separated by a brick mullion. At first floor level, above the door there was a single window, with a paired window above the one at ground floor. The first floor windows were shorter than those on the ground floor. The eaves are plain and the Welsh slate roofs have simple grey V-ridges. With the exception of the two end cottages, the chimney stacks are shared and sit on the dividing walls between nos 2 and 3, 4 and 5 etc.
- 6.3 The door heads have simple gentle red brick arches in contrast to the windows which have shallow pointed arches of gault brick with keystones. Bands of similar gault brick link the sills on each floor.
- 6.4 The door heads are so simple because originally they would have been hidden beneath canopies over the shared front doors. Only that between nos 17 and 18 survives, though the scars of the removed canopies can be seen in the brickwork of the other properties. No original front doors appear to survive. Originally the paired windows had plate glass sashes whilst the window to the originally unheated bedroom above the front door was subdivided into three panes in both upper and lower sashes.



- 6.5 The gables of the two end properties are enlivened by the expressed flues which form an arch before converging roughly in line with eaves and running on to form the stack. Within the arch which the flues create are single windows on each floor of the same style and proportion to those of the front elevation. The verges have simple barge boards supported on the expressed wall plate and purlins.
- 6.6 To the rear, were single storey service wings (presumably wash houses) set slightly off-centre to each cottage. Each had a small chimney stack on the gable end furthest away from the main house and seemingly a later flat roofed toilet was added on the same gable. Each property benefited from a garden around 40ft (12m) long. The gardens had a tall brick wall with blue brick saddleback coping with rear gates accessing a rear passageway serving all the cottages.
- 6.7 All the cottages have retained their Welsh slate roofs and chimney stacks intact. Other features have fared less well. No 1 has fake stone cladding, no 5 has been rendered, nos 6, 7, 14 and 18-20 have had the brickwork painted, whilst no 16 has painted window surrounds and several others have the reveals of the windows painted white to give more light internally.
- 6.8 No property appears to have an original front door. Many windows have also been replaced in a variety of styles. These alterations range from various styles of timber window through to modern upvc windows. Some have applied 'lead' comes and no 17 has tyrolean window shutters.
- 6.9 At the rear, some of the original single storey wings have been demolished and replaced by larger flat roofed structures. These are very visible from the road bridge where they interrupt the rhythm of the terrace and have left ugly scars on the rear brickwork of the houses where the original pitched roofs were flashed into the walls.

Passageway to the rear of the cottages



Path and wall to the pub carpark



View north along the verge



- 6.10 The demolition of the rear passageway wall to allow for the erection of unattractive garages has also robbed the terrace of some of its character. The well-built brick boundary wall to the cottages and the original sett-work path within the passageway to the rear are attractive features; the poor reinstatement works to the path and damaged wall to the pub car park are not. Tall evergreen trees in the rear gardens of nos 2 and 10 provide some greenery though the type and scale are not particularly appropriate and they may cause future damage to the boundary walls if they continue to grow.
- 6.11 The setting of the front of the cottages comprises a narrow rough lane with cars parked outside the houses. Opposite is a good York stone kerb line with a rough pavement and grass verge whilst the railway land is enclosed by an uncompromising galvanised steel fence. Beyond is tarmac and rough ground adjacent to the railway lines with scrub and self set trees. This area contributes little to the setting of the Conservation Area.
- 6.12 Looking north from the road bridge, the vista is stopped by modern houses and a pair of large modern buff brick industrial buildings. The embankment to the road bridge, which encloses views south is of rough grass and self-set trees with a utilitarian post and wire fence at the top of the bank. Part of this is currently within the Conservation Area. The retaining wall at the bottom of the bank is of stone but is in poor condition.
- 6.13 To the east of the cottages stands a large late C19 public house which was built as the Railway Hotel when there was a level crossing over the railway line. This is an imposing building which is today a public house and known as 'The 1852 Brewery Company'. The property has red brick walls and Welsh slate roofs like the cottages. It is of two storeys with a full-height faceted bay window with a pitched roof in the second bay from the west and a single storey rectangular bay with hipped roof at the east end of the façade. Above this is a three-light



sash window with a brick arched head. In the other bays are six panelled doors at ground floor level with sashes with brick arched heads above. There are bands of blue bricks forming a plinth, with further banding below the first floor sills. An attractive dentil cornice decorates the eaves and there are two end chimney stacks.

- 6.14 To the rear is a large contemporary L-shaped wing of similar scale and detailing with further outbuildings reroofed in modern felt. There is a pleasant enclosed garden to the rear of the public house with a large and less attractive car park beyond with small trees and shrubs around the edges and a tall timber fence to the modern houses, nos 6-10 Clarkes Road.
- 6.15 The front of the public house has a tarmac apron used for incidental car parking and a single street light on the edge of the wide footway.

7.0 Key characteristics

- 7.1 The key characteristic of the area is the homogenous character of the traditional buildings. None of the more recent alterations to the cottages have benefited their character and the uniformity of such things as the original building materials, architectural detailing, fenestration, rhythm of window openings and chimney stacks are all characteristics to be enhanced not further eroded by incremental changes.
- 7.2 The presence of the former Railway Hotel adds considerably to the character of the area. It shares its historical origins with the cottages, serves as a reminder of the original position of the road, complements the architecture of the cottages particularly in the brickwork detailing, and continues to add vitality to the area through its use as a public house.
- 7.3 The over-riding feel of the area is very urban with little greenery (other than self-set scrub and trees) whilst even garden areas are largely hidden from public view. Whilst it would be a mistake to introduce significant amounts of soft landscaping to the area, some judicious planting, appropriate hard landscaping and attention to details could massively enhance the character of the area.

8.0 Enhancement opportunities

- 8.1 The restoration of lost features of the Midland Cottages offers the greatest opportunity for enhancement. This should include the careful removal of stone cladding, render and paintwork from the building facades, the reinstatement of sash windows to the original patterns and possibly even the restoration of the front door canopies. The imposition of Article 4 Directions to prevent further loss of original features should be considered. Further details are set out in the Development Control Guidance.
- 8.2 The poor quality of rear extensions is readily apparent from the railway line. A standardised design for rear extensions would help gradually restore the homogeneity of the terrace. Again, this issue is explored in the Development Control Guidance.
- 8.3 Repairs to the rear brick wall of the cottages are required in places, whilst the wall to the pub car park needs to be partly rebuilt. A more appropriate wall to replace the fence around no 1 would also enhance the property. Attempts should be made to persuade the railway company to paint the unattractive galvanised fence to reduce its impact and to provide some improved planting behind it. The grass verge between the fence and the cottages could also be planted with shrubs to reduce the impact of the fence and so significantly enhance the setting of the cottages. The realignment of the fence to allow the pinch-point on the corner to be removed would also be a great benefit.
- 8.4 The garages built at the ends of the terraces lack the quality of materials and detailing of the cottages. Their replacement in more appropriate materials and with pitched roofs would be a significant improvement to the character of the area.

- 8.5 The apron in front of the public house would be significantly enhanced by repaving in appropriate materials such as setts or blue bricks (even if it continues to be used for car parking). Alternatively, given the size of the rear car park, it could be used for sitting out if it was appropriately repaved and landscaped.
- 8.6 The track in front of the cottages is rough and could be resurfaced in bonded gravel or another appropriate finish with the footway repaved with setts or blue brick pavers. The existing kerb should be reused with any damaged lengths replaced with matching York stone.
- 8.7 Despite the proposed removal of the embankment from the Conservation Area, its improved maintenance would improve the outlook particularly of the public house. The retaining wall in particular could be an attractive feature though it requires repair. The loss of the steps down the embankment is regrettable. If the high cost of reinstatement in relation to their level of use means that they are not to be replaced then the scar in the embankment should be removed in any tidying up of the embankment and if possible the position of the steps marked by appropriate detailing in the retaining wall.

9.0 Development Control Guidance

9.1 *Control of minor alterations to the Midland Cottages*

In addition to promoting the restoration of lost features of the cottages, it is important to ensure that features do not continue to be lost. Article 4 Directions will therefore be considered which would mean that Planning Permission would be required for the following types of work:

- Cladding or painting the external walls including window surrounds and reveals.
- Replacing or altering external windows and doors.
- Alterations to the roof, including changing the roof covering, inserting dormers or rooflights.
- Removal or alteration of chimney stacks.
- The demolition or alteration of rear boundary walls.
- The erection of porches, canopies and window shutters.
- The erection of satellite dishes.

The Borough Council will promote the reinstatement of lost features. This will include new windows to the original designs (3 over 3 sashes to the first floor window over the front door and plate glass sash windows elsewhere), a standardised front door design and the reinstatement of front door canopies to match that on nos 17 and 18.

9.2 *Rear extensions to the Midland Cottages*

The backs of the cottages are very visible from the main road and the replacement of the single storey pitched roofed service wings with flat-roofed extensions has damaged the unified character of the terrace.

The Borough Council will consider having designs prepared for a replacement rear wing with suitable brick walls and pitched slate roof. This will be used as the template for future rear extensions to the cottages to restore their character. Applications for alterations to the rear wings will only be considered if they conform to this template or the applicant can justify why a slightly different design is required.

9.3 *Retention of community facility*

The change of use of the public house will be resisted unless it can be proved that the use is economically unviable, it will be converted to some other acceptable form of community use and the appearance of the building will be retained or enhanced.

The public house is an important aspect of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Whilst the appearance of the building could be retained even if the use of the building changed, the historical associations of the former hotel to the railway line would still be lost. If it can be proved that the use as a public house is not viable, conversion to a suitable new community use will be considered provided that some form of interpretation material which chronicles the previous use of the building and its associations with the railway is provided in a publicly accessible part of the building.

9.4 *Demolition and redevelopment*

The demolition of any significant local building will not be approved unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the building is structurally unsound, it cannot continue in its current use and it cannot be converted to another acceptable use or there are major public benefits from demolition which would outweigh the architectural and historic interest of the building and its contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Any new development on land within or which affects the setting of the Midland Cottages Conservation Area must:-

- Respect the two storey scale of all the buildings within the area.
- Be built either of matching materials to the existing buildings or provide a successful contrast with them.

- Have window and door openings, bays, chimney stacks and other features positioned to produce a clear rhythm reflecting the character of existing buildings.
- Directly address the street and have a strong vertical proportion.
- Have appropriate architectural detailing to window and door heads, eaves, verges, gable ends etc.
- Produce a simple silhouette with ridge lines broken only by chimney stacks.
- Have suitable boundary treatments.

10.0 References

- Colver J, 'Wigston Magna: It's Buildings Extant, Altered or Demolished', Framework Knitters Museum, Wigston (Reprint 2001).
- Victoria County History Vol 3.
- Royal Commisision of the Historic Monuments in England 'Workers Housing in West Yorkshire, 1750-1920: HSMO, London (1986).
- Thanks to the Leicestershire Records Office for the supply of the 1885 and 1914 Ordnance Survey maps.

