

OADBY HILL TOP AND MEADOWCOURT CONSERVATION AREAS

REPORT OF CONSULTATION

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July 2005

1. INTRODUCTION

QuBE Planning Ltd were appointed by the Borough of Oadby and Wigston to carry out an appraisal of the Oadby Hill Top and Meadowcourt Conservation Areas, to produce development control guidelines and then to subject both draft documents to a period of public consultation.

This report describes the public consultation undertaken, summarises the representations received and sets out a response to the principal areas of concern to allow the Borough Council to decide whether to amend the documents prior to final approval and publication.

2. METHODOLOGY

The public consultation comprised;

- A full colour leaflet summarising the conservation area appraisal and development control guidelines was prepared and together with a short questionnaire was issued to some 250 properties in the conservation area and immediately outside the current boundary from the 18 April 2005. The consultation period finished on 3 June 2005.
- A copy of the leaflet can be found in Appendix 1
- A copy of the leaflet and questionnaire was also distributed to key stakeholders.
- A public exhibition was staged in The Classroom at the University of Leicester Botanic Garden on Tuesday 10 May between 10.00 am and 8.00pm. Staff from the Borough Council were available to deal with comments and questions
- A copy of the exhibition panels can be found in Appendix 2
- As a result of interest generated in the immediate area further photocopies of the leaflet and questionnaire were delivered to properties in adjacent streets, but the precise extent of this circulation is not known
- A press release was issued and coverage appeared in the Leicester Mercury.

3. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Level of response

A total of 101 questionnaires were returned, but it is not possible to accurately state a percentage response rate as the final number of circulated questionnaires is unknown.

Letters were received from 5 people and a detailed response was made on behalf of the University of Leicester.

The exhibition was attended by 44 people.

Overall comments

The majority of people who completed a questionnaire supported the Conservation Area Appraisal and the Development Control Guidelines. Of those completing a questionnaire:

- 82% thought the Conservation Area Appraisal accurately described the character and qualities of the area.
- 94% supported the inclusion of the houses known as Stoughton Leys, Bredon and Fields House, together with the university athletics track and the avenue of trees along Southmeads. This proposal is however opposed by the University.
- 66% supported the removal from the Conservation Area of 24 and 26 Stoughton Drive South and the modern houses on St David's Crescent, Sycamore Close and Powys Avenue.
- At least 78% supported the various enhancement opportunities.
- At least 94% of people supported all of the Development Control Guidelines.

A detailed breakdown of the questionnaire responses and a summary of the comments made can be found as Appendix 3.

4. MAIN ISSUES AND COMMENTARY

As anticipated, a number of issues have been raised by people responding to the questionnaire. Some of these were points of accuracy, for example drawing the Conservation Area boundary through a private garden or wrongly labelling a property on the map. These comments have been collated and can be found in Appendix 4 and it is recommended that the Appraisal is modified to incorporate the changes prior to final publication.

This table sets out the principal comments and gives a response and a recommendation for consideration by the Borough Council. Where similar comments have been made under more than one section of the questionnaire the responses are dealt with under the most appropriate heading to avoid duplication.

Comment	Response	Recommendation
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL		
Accuracy of the appraisal in describing the character and qualities of the area		
Include Lodge in Grounds of the Coppice as a Significant Local Building	Whilst this is an attractive building it is not felt to be of such significant or historical interest as the other SLBs	No change
Factual Errors or omissions		
See Appendix 4	See Appendix 4	See Appendix 4
Proposed inclusions		
The area of land to the south of the University playing fields from Southmeads Road to the rear of properties on Southmeads Close	Whilst the area has value as open land, it lacks the historical significance of the land attached to Fields House now occupied by the running track. The latter survives as a reminder of the former occupation and use of the land and is therefore a defining element of this part of the Conservation Area. The land south of Southmeads Close is therefore omitted from the proposed Conservation Area boundary	No change
The area of land to the east of the university playing fields up to Southmeads Rd/Blackthorn Lane	This area is less important to the historical development of the area than the land attached to Fields House (see above). It has remained undeveloped by chance rather than because of its former use and therefore it lacks the historic interest of the running track land.	No change
Southmeads Close	This area undoubtedly has character as a bosky 1960s open plan development. This is not the same character as the	No change

	rest of the area however and is not worthy of Conservation Area designation in its own right.	
Proposed Exclusions		
Retain Sycamore Close within the Conservation Area	Only mentioned by one person who would prefer to live in a conservation area. This is a modern development and is of a completely different character to the remainder of the area.	No change
Retain St David's Crescent in the Conservation Area.	Only mentioned by one person who thought it was 'nicely developed'. This is a modern development and is of a completely different character to the remainder of the area.	No change
Generally there were concerns that the removal could allow worse houses or non residential properties to be put in their place	Redevelopment of these sites would still require planning consent and therefore control can still be exercised	No change
Enhancement opportunities identified in Appraisal		
Greenhouses to rear of Highgrove – several concerns were expressed about the cost and the future use	The potential for grant aiding the repair may need to be explored to enable the buildings to be successfully restored.	No change
Screening to university houses, particularly Gilbert Murray Hall – the majority of comments related to this being at the University's expense	The opportunity for enhanced screening should be discussed with the University. Grant aid from the Borough Council for this type of work would not be considered.	No change
Screening of Beaumont Hall – comments principally related to cost	As above.	No change
Possible additional enhancement opportunities		
Volume and speed of vehicles, especially on Stoughton Drive South	Not an issue for the Conservation Area Appraisal	No change, but refer to highway authority
Restrict on street car parking	Not an issue for the Conservation Area Appraisal	No change, but refer to highway authority
Improve condition of roads and footways	Not an issue for the Conservation Area Appraisal	No change, but refer to highway authority
Trees should be planted along Knighton Rise	Will require highway authority approval. Potential enhancement subject to funding	No change, but refer to highway authority
Completion of Eastern Distributor	Not an issue for the	No change,

Road – raised by several people as a means of reducing impact of traffic on the Conservation Area

Conservation Area Appraisal

but refer to highway authority

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL GUIDANCE

The following were suggested for inclusion in the Guidance:

Retention of University Athletics track for recreational use and open space	The Conservation Area Appraisal and DC guidelines are not intended to prevent development, rather to ensure it takes account of the character and qualities of the area	No change
Development of University (including Conference centre) would be inappropriate in a residential areas and would add to traffic	The Conservation Area Appraisal and DC guidelines are not intended to prevent development, rather to ensure it takes account of the character and qualities of the area	No change
Retention of high quality boundary treatments, including replacement of trees and hedges	Already Included	No change
Better enforcement of unauthorised building works and tree and hedge loss	Not a matter for the DC Guidelines	No change
Encouragement of high standards of craftsmanship	Not a matter for the DC Guidelines	No change
Ensure all property owners are made aware of need for planning approvals on Conservation Area	Not a matter for the DC Guidelines	No change, but Council to ensure all property owners are notified

Summary of letters received

A number of letters were received during the consultation period and these are summarised below:

Comment	Response	Recommendation
Turley Associates on behalf of the University of Leicester		
<p>Concerns expressed that the Conservation Area Appraisal fails to fully acknowledge recent planning approvals.</p> <p>The boundary for the extension is considered 'surprising' as it is coincidental with site for a management training centre which has been refused planning permission.</p>	<p>In order to ensure the Conservation Area Appraisal was not influenced by such information no details of these were passed to the consultants in advance of their appraisal of the area.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>The University was in the area before the designation of a Conservation Area and it should be appreciated that it is an essential element of the area and adds a unique ingredient to it.</p>	<p>Accepted and reference is already made in the Appraisal</p>	<p>Amend text to reflect nature of the area upon designation</p>
<p>By concentrating principally on the early period of development the appraisal misses the opportunity to explicitly celebrate the mixture of old and new/er (e.g. interesting buildings by notable mid 20th century architects) all held together by mature landscape. This is surely an obvious/particular aspect of the character of the conservation area which it would be strange not to recognise as something that distinguishes it conservation from others.</p>	<p>The appraisal naturally concentrates on the 'first wave' of development as there are a substantial number of buildings from this age. Indeed much of the character of the area is derived from this intensive development over a short period.</p> <p>There are numerous references to more modern buildings within the text. Where such buildings enhance or even preserve the character of the area this is clearly acknowledged.</p> <p>The landscape setting of the area, including that around later C20 developments is clearly celebrated in the text.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>The proposed inclusion of the running track is opposed because:</p>		
<p>- Unlike the existing conservation areas the running track site is not defined by houses with gardens. It represents part (only) of an area of land which does not have the suburban plot/gardens that characterise the existing conservation area.</p>	<p>It is a very strange argument that Conservation Areas should not include areas of open space. Many thousands of conservation areas, based on urban areas, suburbs and villages include areas of open space in addition to buildings. By the same argument, the Botanic Garden would be removed from the area.</p>	<p>No change</p>

<p>- The extension of the conservation area as a complete block between Manor Road and Southmeads Road has the effect of including university sports facilities (both buildings and the running track itself) which have no significant historic relationship to the conservation area and which in our view it is inappropriate to include as they would undermine the overall value and credibility of designation.</p> <p>The reasons given for the inclusion of the running track site focus on a group of three unlisted 1920s houses. These three properties, whilst obviously having a relationship in time to others in the conservation area, are physically separated from most of their contemporaries. The argument that open land associated with Fields House is in some way important historically is a very tenuous one based on arguing the significance of a former 'model farm and lake'. The model farm is no longer in existence and whilst the lake does exist the whole use of the land has changed since Fields House was built, bearing no relevance to the historical situation. Whilst of some local historical interest this analysis fails to make the case for inclusion of the whole running track site. The three houses are unlisted and at least one of them has previously been regarded by Councils officers as not worthy of retention. If they are now to be seen as an extension of the conservation area this could be better achieved by the designation of a localised extension around them or at most along the Manor Road South Side frontage only. One must also query why the buildings/land is now worthy of protection through inclusion within the conservation area, when they were not considered of sufficient merit for inclusion within the original conservation area.</p>	<p>The three houses east of the running track are quite clearly of equal character to many of the houses within the original boundary. They should therefore be included.</p> <p>The open space, now occupied by the running track was historically the curtilage of one of these houses, Field House, when it housed a model farm and pleasure grounds. Given this historical connection together with the contribution of the space and trees to the landscape structure, the inclusion of this land is considered to be justifiable.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>- The University's running track site is an important opportunity for the university to consolidate and develop its Oadby estate including new sports and academic conference facilities. The university is willing to guarantee that the three '20s houses will be retained. Given the existing protection for trees on the site, there appears no practical benefit to be achieved from extending the conservation area, although</p>	<p>The University's guarantee to retain all three of the 1920's houses is welcomed.</p>	<p>No Change</p>

<p>designation will add bureaucracy inhibiting the process of resolving new development.</p>		
<p>- Advice on the designation of conservation areas encourages the identification of complete and coherent areas, typically including both sides of an historic street environment. In contrast, the proposed addition of the running track site would involve land on one side only of Manor Road and Southmeads Road in neither case giving protection to a complete historic street scene of any note</p>	<p>PPG 15 para 4.2 states ' It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. There has been increasing recognition in recent years that our experience of a historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings - on the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular 'mix' of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Conservation area designation should be seen as the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and of ensuring that conservation policy addresses the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as the protection of individual buildings.'</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>- Although the running track does have limited environmental interest, this is a matter for other local planning policies in respect of open space, sports facilities, ecology and environmental protection it is not appropriate or necessary to include the land in the Conservation Area</p>	<p>The inclusion is not being put forward for these 'environmental' reasons</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>The University supports the majority of the Development Control guidance, but raises concerns about:</p>		
<p>The need to protect listed buildings is recognised, although there will be cases where demolition, for example of recent unsympathetic additions, could serve to return the building to an original/ appropriate state. As such paragraph 4.2 should be amended to reflect these instances, in a similar way to Section 8 where it is accepted that buildings can sustain alteration and extension.</p>	<p>The guidance is not meant to imply that removal of unsympathetic additions would be refused.</p>	<p>Amend text to clarify guidance</p>
<p>Paragraph 4.3 - there will be instances where demolition is</p>	<p>The requirement for a planning consent to be in place prior to</p>	<p>No change</p>

<p>required as part of a larger scheme, whereby demolition is necessary to gain access to the remainder of the development area. On the issue of 'gaps' surely these are most relevant in frontages rather than areas deep within larger sites which are not visually accessible, a point which should be reflected upon.</p>	<p>demolition is to avoid unsightly gaps. This is in line with the guidance in PPG 15 S 4.29</p> <p>The detail would be a matter to be dealt with on a case by case basis in the supporting information accompanying the Conservation Area Consent. Clearly if the site was largely invisible, then unconditional demolition may be appropriate.</p>	
<p>Paragraph 6.1 is considered too restrictive, as there are areas where some loss of hedgerow/boundary can be sustained without causing significant detriment. Accordingly there is a need to assess individual proposals, balancing any adverse impact on the conservation area against the benefits which would derive from the intended development.</p>	<p>The guidance sets out criteria to be used in assessing a proposal for the subdivision of plots. It will be for applicants to put forward a detailed justification for the subdivision of plots bearing in mind the guidance. If there are other considerations which outweigh the guidance these will be considered on a case by case basis.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Paragraph 11.4 relating to open spaces will be of particular significance to the University if the running track site were to be included within the conservation area. It would be more appropriate if the development control guidance were expanded to give more specific guidance on development of such a significant site, confirming the principle that development can take place and defining the particular characteristics of the form it should take so as to relate successfully to the existing conservation area. This could either be by way of including specific site development briefing within the conservation area development control guidance (we are aware of many precedents for such inclusions) or by reference to the use of the Masterplan process to resolve proposals in a close working dialogue between the university and the council. Indeed the masterplan approach is actively promoted earlier within the guidance document.</p>	<p>Whilst it would be possible to include further information within the guidance it is considered that the preparation of a masterplan by the college in consultation with the Borough Council is a reasonable way forward.</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Further on 11.4, the need to ensure no significant adverse effect on ecology is noted, although the important issue must be the sensitivity/significance of the ecological interest rather than a blanket ban on development. Appreciating this, the use of SPG seems an entirely inappropriate mechanism to try and control development on open space, which</p>	<p>It is not the intention of the guidelines to seek to 'sterilise' sites or to introduce 'blanket bans' on development.</p> <p>The Introduction to the Guidelines makes it clear that the adopted Local Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework set the overall policy context for the guidelines.</p>	<p>No change</p>

<p>as planning guidance indicates is better done by way of policy. With and open area there are issues of the value of that land/its contribution; its status; access; function and its development history making it previously developed land etc. If all open areas are to be sterilised in such a way there will be instances where it would conflict with national guidance which promotes use of appropriate urban sites, making efficient use of the land available. In making such observation, the University appreciates the value of such spaces and the need for careful treatment.</p>		
<p>A P Smith, Wychwood, 17 The Fairway</p>		
<p>Appraisal does not fully acknowledge the undesirable effects of traffic</p> <p>The Council should press for the completion of the eastern Distributor Road.</p> <p>More people should have been made aware of the consultation</p>	<p>Not an issue for the appraisal</p> <p>Not an issue for the appraisal</p> <p>All those within the Conservation Area were consulted</p>	<p>No change</p> <p>No change</p> <p>No change</p>
<p>J Serjeant (signature unclear), Ashbrook, 12 Southmeads Close</p>		
<p>Wishes to see the area of land to the south and east of the proposed boundary included within the Conservation Area.</p> <p>Further efforts needed to encourage retention of hedges</p>	<p>See earlier comments</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Mrs R Kaur, 11 The Broadway and B Takhar, 15 The Broadway</p>		
<p>Conservation Area boundary currently cuts through garden and should be amended to remove the garden.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>	<p>Amend boundary</p>
<p>M J Linsley (signature unclear) 'Seaton', 17 Southmeads Road</p>		
<p>Southmeads Close should be included within the conservation Area as it has matured into a very attractive area</p>	<p>See earlier comments</p>	<p>No change</p>

5. CONCLUSIONS

1. There was a high level of interest in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Development Control Guidelines and both were generally well supported in the responses received.
2. The Conservation Area Appraisal is generally considered to accurately reflect the character and qualities of the area.
3. There is strong support from local residents for including land currently occupied by the University athletics track within the Conservation Area.
4. The University of Leicester is opposed to such an extension of the Conservation Area.
5. The Development Control Guidelines are generally well supported by both local residents and the University.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Conservation Area boundary should be extended to include the land occupied by the University athletics track.
2. The Conservation Area boundary should be amended to exclude 24 and 26 Stoughton Drive South and the modern houses on St David's Crescent, Sycamore Close and Powys Ave.
3. The draft Conservation Area Appraisal should be amended in line with the recommendations in Appendix 4 prior to final publication.

