



South Wigston Conservation Area Appraisal

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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	5
5.0	Setting	8
6.0	Townscape Analysis	9
7.0	Key Characteristics	33
8.0	Proposed Changes to the Conservation Area Boundary	35
9.0	Enhancement Opportunities	36

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The South Wigston 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. It should be read in conjunction with the 'Development Control Guidance for the South Wigston Conservation Area' which has been produced to accompany 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 full colour leaflet summarising the Conservation Area Appraisal and the associated Development Control Guidance was prepared, and together with a short questionnaire was issued to some 1500 properties in the Conservation Area and immediately outside the current boundary.
 - A copy of the leaflet and questionnaire 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.

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.

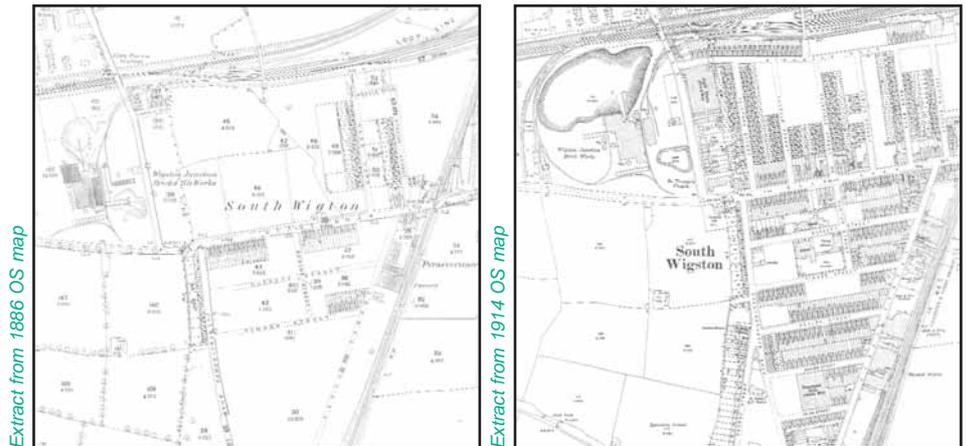


3.0 Overview of the Area

- 3.1 South Wigston is a town developed in the late C19 by the owner of a large brickworks. The settlement follows the tradition of establishing 'model' towns set by Victorian philanthropists at places such as New Lanark and Saltaire and continued in towns such as Bourneville and Port Sunlight. Unlike the majority of these other towns however, South Wigston was not just intended to house workers in the brickyard. Other commercial premises, particularly associated with the clothing industry, were established right from the start.
- 3.2 Like model settlements such as Saltaire, the settlement pattern is generally laid out as a grid and most of the housing is in terraces. Most of the houses are of similar type (though some were slightly bigger and had front gardens) with just a few larger houses on Orange Street, Blaby Road (until many were converted to shops) and particularly Saffron Road built to house wealthier residents. The clear provision of different sizes and standards of housing to suit different 'classes' of occupiers is not so great as in many model towns.
- 3.3 Although there are differences of detailing between the terraces and groups of houses, the area has a very strong character. The principal reason for this is that the buildings were seemingly all built using bricks from Orson Wright's Wigston Junction Brick Works. The majority of traditional buildings are therefore of red brick with a colour range towards orange and purple, with a few houses of gault brick or with such brick used as detailing. Whilst decorative brickwork is used for the eaves, window and door heads and boundary walls, it is rarely used for the window surrounds and mullions. These appear to have been standard off-the-peg designs in most cases.
- 3.4 In terms of town planning, Blaby Road was the main cross route and was lined by many of the shops and public buildings. Canal Street was the home of most of the industrial and manufacturing concerns and had shops on some street corners and some public buildings especially at the north end. Countesthorpe Road had some industrial

uses and public buildings. The schools were all located off Bassett Street, whilst the housing was generally located on east-west orientated streets south of Blaby Road and north-south running streets north of Blaby Road. This was presumably to avoid very long streets of terraced properties which might have appeared rather monotonous.

- 3.5 The settlement developed very quickly and was largely complete by the time Orson Wright died in 1913. Thereafter the main development was the provision of local authority housing on the undeveloped sites. Some of this was in terraces, the rest in more typical semi-detached forms. A park was formed beyond the eastern railway line in 1929, whilst the recreation ground which stood to the west of Orange Street (and Park Road) was developed for housing in the 1980s.
- 3.6 Today South Wigston retains its strong character despite more recent building and alterations to many of the houses. Some of the industrial uses have contracted or ceased and the buildings they have left behind perhaps offer the major scope for enhancement of the area.



4.0 Brief History / Archaeology

- 4.1 Before the establishment of South Wigston in 1883, the area was largely open fields. In 1840 a railway line was created between Leicester and Rugby which ran to the east of where Canal Street stands today. Another line to the north of Kirkdale Road was established in 1872. The canal, which runs south of the township was opened in 1792 and a house stood by the Countesthorpe Road near the bridges over the river and canal.
- 4.2 There is little archaeological interest in the area. However to the east of the Countesthorpe Road / Canal Street junction was Crow Mill which is recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Register as a medieval windmill. The building was a post-mill where the whole structure could be turned into the prevailing wind. The building survived into the C20 and is shown as disused on the 1886 Ordnance Survey Map, though it had gone by the second edition of the map in 1914.
- 4.3 The 1886 Ordnance Survey Map shows the beginnings of the settlement. The brickworks are the largest single concern to the west of Saffron Road. Blaby Road is the most developed road with three terraces of properties along the south side; one of 25 properties to the east of Countesthorpe Road, one of 18 to the east of Dunton Street and a smaller terrace from the corner of Canal Street to the level crossing and South Wigston station. On the north side of Blaby Road, the only buildings were four terraced properties to the west of Station Street.
- 4.4 Other buildings completed by 1886 included houses on the west side of Glen Gate and Station Street with three buildings on the north side of Kirkdale Road and a block of four houses on the east side of Station Street. South of Blaby Road, there was a long row of seemingly very small cottages on the west side of Countesthorpe Road (where the car park is today) and a block on the north east end of Timber Street which probably had a shop on the corner and a pair of houses fronting Canal Street. A larger pair faced them on the east side of Canal Street and to the north was a large factory called the

Perseverance Works. Countesthorpe Road was the main route to the south and this went under the railway, past Crow Mill and out into open countryside. The line of much of Canal Street, together with the streets north of Timber Street had been laid out, whilst north of Blaby Road two tracks existed though seemingly they were relocated to later become Fairfield and Leopold Streets.

- 4.5 Development continued apace in the next few years and by 1893, many new houses along the streets off Canal Street with some larger houses on Orange Street had been built. Blaby Road continued to be developed for houses, shops and some public buildings as well as the site of Orson Wright's own house, Ashbourne, on the corner of Glen Gate. St Thomas' Church was built (minus the tower) in 1893 to replace the 'tin church' which continued in service as the Sunday school until it was replaced in the late 1920s. North of Blaby Road, terraces were built on Leopold Street, Fairfield Street and Glen Gate.
- 4.6 By 1914 over 600 houses together with more factories, shops, churches and schools had been built. Despite this, vacant lots (or 'greens' as they were popularly known) were a feature of most of the streets in the town and were used as informal play areas. In the late 1920s many of these were built on to provide Local Authority Housing in terraced form on Kirkdale Road and some of the surrounding streets with semi-detached houses on several other streets.
- 4.7 The park opened in 1929 as the major amenity land and the biscuit factory developed. The brick works however had ceased production in the early 1930s, though there were still a number of major employers in the area including Toon and Black's Footwear factory on Saffron Road and Morrison the Electric Vehicle Manufacturers who took over Brunswick Mills between Garden and Irlam Streets in the 1930s.
- 4.8 In the later C20, Orson Wright's house was demolished and replaced by shops, two of the schools off Bassett Street were demolished, Toon

and Black's factory redeveloped and virtually the whole block between Irlam and Garden Streets was redeveloped for housing in 2004/5. The biscuit factory on Canal Street has expanded but many of the old industrial concerns, large and small are now empty or underused. Map 1 describes the ages of buildings within the conservation area.

- 4.9 The area continues to be a popular residential area. The vast majority of the quite modest terraced houses are occupied. Whilst many have undergone changes particularly to windows, doors and roof coverings and some have been painted or rendered, the streets retain a strong character.
- 4.10 The challenge for the future is to preserve the character of the area and enhance it. This will ensure that the area continues to be an attractive and popular place to live and work.



5.0 Setting

- 5.1 South Wigston stands approximately 3.5 miles due south of Leicester City Centre. To the north of the settlement is the railway line and beyond the built up areas of both Oadby and Wigston and Leicester City. Around 1.5 miles to the east is the centre of Wigston itself, whilst to the west are more recent housing developments of South Wigston and beyond an area of open land with the town of Blaby just over a mile away.
- 5.2 Whilst from most directions, South Wigston is one of a number of settlements around the edge of Leicester which have visually merged together, the same is not true when entering the settlement from the south. Approaching from the south, there is an abrupt transition from open farmland where the road from Countesthorpe crosses the Grand Union Canal. From the bridge over the canal, the industrial buildings are clearly visible.
- 5.3 The northern boundary of the Conservation Area is formed by the railway line, whilst the Grand Union Canal effectively defines the southern boundary. The eastern boundary is now largely defined by the playing fields and originally this boundary would have been even more marked due to the presence of the railway line. The western boundary is less distinct being largely formed by Saffron Road, Countesthorpe Road and Orange Street.