

WIRRAL COUNCIL

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 21 MAY 2009 ECONOMY REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15TH JUNE 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN THURSTASTON CONSERVATION AREA

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Donald Insall and Associates were appointed in March 2007 to carry out appraisals and management plans for sixteen Conservation Areas in the Wirral. This report covers Thurstaston. The Appraisal and Management Plan are attached.

2. THE APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 2.1 Conservation Area Appraisals have been promoted by English Heritage as useful documents for the understanding of the significance, character and appearance of such areas. Management Plans are intended to follow on from appraisals to provide a focus for action and management of conservation areas.
- 2.2 Conservation Areas were included in the BVPI indicators (219a, b, and c) when the work was commissioned. For the current year BVPI 219c (the percentage of conservation areas with management plans) has been dispensed with, and in future years the indicators 219a and b (number of conservation areas and percentage with character appraisals), will no longer be used as assessments of Local Authority performance. Notwithstanding this, the Council is committed to conserving the Borough's natural and built heritage; and increasing civic pride and public participation, through its Corporate Objectives.
- 2.3 The Conservation Area Appraisals have been carried out in accordance with the advice published by English Heritage (Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals - February 2006). In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been generally used as the basis of the analysis:-
- Location and population
 - Origins and development of the settlement
 - Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
 - Archaeological significance
 - Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
 - Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
 - Character and relationship of spaces
 - Prevalent and traditional building materials
 - Local details
 - Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
 - Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
 - Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
 - Existence of any neutral areas

- 2.4 The Appraisal will act as an audit of the area and give residents, applicants, and others an understanding of the special qualities of the conservation area and any negative factors. The Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, should be adopted by the Council and used as a material consideration in determining any planning applications within or affecting the setting of the conservation area.
- 2.5 Management Plans, on the other hand, are relatively rare and English Heritage advice more amorphous. (Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas – February 2006) The management plan has required some thought to give it structure. At this stage of the process the Management Plan is an agenda for future action and consideration. This part of the document relies on the analysis contained in the appraisal to set out the issues and negative factors affecting both the private and public realm. As such it is the first stage in a management plan process which will refine the plan through further consultation, joint officer working and budgetary request.
- 2.6 Most of the Appraisals have been discussed with the local Conservation Area Advisory Committees in order for local residents and others to give their perspectives on the areas and contribute to the analysis. To have real weight, Management Plans need to be discussed not only with local groups but also corporately in terms of policy and enhancement action having regard to the resources available. These first essays will act as an agenda for detailed policy development for DC purposes; a yardstick for members of the public to comment on planning applications; a stimulus to corporate working in regard to the management of the public realm; and a “wish list” for its enhancement.

3. THURSTASTON

- 3.1 The following is a list of features and information that are part of the Conservation Area’s special character:

Introduction

Although the form and setting of the settlement has been shaped over many centuries, going back to the first millennium, apart from the Hall, no medieval building fabric remains and the area owes much of its present character to developments of the mid and later C19. Its special historic, landscape and architectural values can be summarised as follows:

Historical Development

- Ancient settlement dating from the pre Norman period with possible associations with the Norse occupation of north west Wirral in the 9th and 10th centuries.
- Retains the quintessential features of an historic small English hamlet with Manor house, church, farm houses and farm buildings grouped loosely around a public ‘green’.
- Illustrates the dramatic changes of the early C19 with the enclosure of common land. The changes of the C18 ‘agrarian revolution’ came late to this area and are well illustrated through the documentary record and can be interpreted through today’s landscape.
- Shows the ‘secondary’ impact of the rapid mid to late C19 urban growth of Liverpool and Birkenhead and its associated commercial, industrial and urban expansion. A quiet and picturesque location, it became a place where the wealthy could live and define a lifestyle far removed from the grime and clamour of port and factory. Here a few extremely rich individuals sought to recreate a medieval idyll by constructing a new church in the style of the 13C, a new model farm, and new baronial hall (Dawpool House). A measure of their supreme wealth was the re-routing of a major highway through a concealed cutting. These latter developments were undertaken by the Ismay family which owned the White Star Line. The aspirations and wealth that sank the A540 below the level of the

surrounding hillside also built the “Titanic” the world’s largest ocean liner which sank on its maiden voyage. The removal of the late C19 Dawpool House was perhaps a symptom of the decline of Liverpool’s mercantile position and base for shipping company owners but the exclusive landscape character of the Dawpool estate was maintained.

Archaeology

- The vista, from above the village looking down across the fields to the church with the Dee estuary and Welsh hills beyond, is picturesque and provides a defining image of the west Wirral landscape.
- The views, within the conservation area across the ‘green’ towards the church and hall, up over the fields towards the wooded knoll above the village and down the pathway leading to Heswall, still retain a strong rural character. They also show the sensitivity of the changes brought about in the mid C19 to the notions of the picturesque and an idealised concept of the ‘medieval’.
- The wooded private residential grounds which make up the northern and western parts of the conservation area and the open fields to the east make a positive contribution to the wider landscape of west Wirral.

Landscape and Vistas

- The vista, from above the village looking down to across the fields to the church with the Dee estuary and Welsh hills beyond, is picturesque and a provides defining image of the west Wirral landscape.
- The views, within the conservation area across the ‘green’ towards the church and hall, up over the fields towards the wooded knoll above the village and down the pathway leading to Heswall, still retain a strong rural character. They also show and show the sensitivity of the changes brought about in the mid C19 to the notions of the picturesque and an idealised concept of the ‘medieval’.
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Townscape, Principal Buildings, Materials and Details

- The church is the focal point of the conservation area and a fine mid C19 recreation of C13 style by an eminent Victorian architect.
- The dominant feature of the Hall, although ‘multi period’, is its late C17 façade and entrance gate way which has survived as a remarkably intact and relatively rare example of its type.
- Dawpool farm, old school house and lodge to the former Dawpool residence (Zone D) form a fine tightly knit group of buildings from the 1860s to 1880s. The use of common building materials (red sandstone) and common architectural style based on late medieval and Jacobean precedents reinforce the cohesion of the group. The ‘model’ farm buildings are excellent examples of their period.
- The historic farm houses and barns within the south side of the conservation area (Zone A and C) are vernacular in character based on a rural tradition rather than designed to a ‘period style’.
- The mid to later C20 residences which characterise the north part of the conservation area (Zone E) are generally hidden from public view.
- The existing sandstone boundary walls and close cut hedges add to the rural character of the area.

- Remaining areas of cobbled surface, rough 'un-metalled' tracks and soft verges which support wild flora are all important to maintaining the area's rural appearance.

4.0 COMMENTS OF THE THURSTASTON CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAAC)

- 4.1 The Irby, Thurstaston and Pensby Amenity Society (ITPAS) through the CAAC have written very full comments and these are reproduced as an Appendix. It considers that the report is very thorough, informative and well constructed and that Donald Insall's should be congratulated on the report. Comments are made on their 5 main areas of concern.

Boundary

- 4.2 ITPAS recommends wider extensions northwards, southwards and eastwards to relate to historic matters and vistas. *Comment – On first examination the sheer extent of the proposed extensions would not be compatible with government advice. Conservation areas are intended to be centred on buildings with an associated setting; it is not intended that vast swathes of landscape should be included. That said, some of the proposed inclusions nearer the existing conservation area merit assessment. Insall's, on balance, recommended leaving the boundary and this would be material to further consideration in the overall report on boundary changes.*

St Bartholomew's Church

- 4.3 *Comment – the extensions to the church have only been granted approval. Until they are implemented and are facts on the ground they should not be included in the appraisal. As exception has been made for the roundabout because of its sheer impact and accommodation works have already been carried out.*

New Roundabout and Signage and Street works

- 4.4 *Comment – The roundabout if and when constructed will have a major impact on this part of the Conservation Area. Careful liaison will be needed with the Highway Design Consultancy as the scheme progresses within the terms of the planning permission. Within the constraints of Highway Design requirements consideration should be given to minimising the impact of highway signs and road markings. For instance, in conservation areas reduced width yellow lines can be installed with less impact on the road scene. It is expected that any felled trees will be replaced with suitable size and species of trees.*

Inappropriate Building Modifications

- 4.5 ITPAS fully supports the need for Article 4 directions to prevent inappropriate building modifications.

Closing comments

- 4.6 *Comment – All applications within the conservation area or affecting its setting involve an internal consultation with the conservation section by the development control section. It is important that development control staff are familiar with the appraisals and management plans and the understanding and good practice which they espouse.*

5.0 BOUNDARY CHANGES AND ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS

- 5.1 The current boundary fully covers the extent of the historic settlement to the west of the A540 and incorporates much of the late C19 landscape and C20 residences associated with the former Dawpool House. In these terms the present boundary is clearly defined by the roads and boundaries, wherever it has been practical to do so. At section 3.1, this study also notes buildings of interest to the east of the A540 which are outside the present boundary. On Irby Lane there is a group of pre C20 buildings (Hill Farm and adjacent) one or two of which are shown on the 1830s Tithe map. These are of historic interest and have group value. Also the A540 rock cutting has landscape and historic value and to the south of the cutting, the Cottage Loaf makes a positive contribution to the wider scene. Although, of some local historic importance these features have no direct visual link with the core of the conservation area and on this basis their exclusion from its boundaries is not inappropriate. Furthermore they are severed from the conservation area by the A540 and their visual separation will increase if the new round about is to proceed at the Station Road junction. Consideration has also been given to Church Farm and its associated non-residential buildings. It could be argued that, this being a relatively recent development, it is not part of the historic settlement and could be excluded from the conservation area. However, it sits within the settlement's historic field pattern and, in terms of planning controls, the conservation area is better protected by its remaining within its boundaries. It is therefore recommended that the conservation boundary does not change.
- 5.2 Article 4 directions are not just an automatic consequence of conservation area designation, but should derive from a careful assessment of what is of special interest within an area and should be preserved. Permitted development rights should only be withdrawn where there is evidence to prove that such development would damage the character of a conservation area and is currently taking place.
- 5.3 In the case of Thurstaston, there are currently no article 4 directions associated with the unlisted buildings. In order to protect the existing unlisted historic buildings and to encourage the reinstatement of lost features, it is recommended that article 4 directions are used to withdraw permitted development rights for the following elements:
- Windows and doors
 - Roof coverings and roof features
 - The colour and surface treatment of elevations.
 - Boundary walls
 - Solar panels on front roofs.
- 5.4 It is considered that the making of Article 4 directions could have considerable implications for staff resources in the conservation section. As planning applications arising from the withdrawal of permitted development rights attract no processing fee there would be a further case load on development control staff without compensatory funding.
- 5.5 Whilst Insall's recommendations represent a professional assessment, it is considered that, as such recommendations are made for all the Conservation Areas except Flaybrick Cemetery, further consideration needs to be given to this issue after all the 16 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are reported to Committee.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial or staffing implications arising out of this appraisal. However, the management plan has potential implications for finance and staffing resources if the recommendation of making an article 4 direction were to be implemented. Maintenance of historic lamp standards and conservation grade paving and kerbing may require additional Council investment.

7.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None.

9.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Thurstaston Conservation Area is within West Kirby and Thurstaston Ward

10.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are positive benefits in conservation areas in retaining heritage assets and the embodied energy contained in them, thereby reducing the Borough's carbon emissions.

11.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan can be used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and can be used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.

12.0 CRIME AND DISORDER STRATEGY / COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 English Heritage - Conservation Area Appraisals – February 2006
English Heritage – Management Plans – February 2006

14.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended to Cabinet that:-

- (1) The Thurstaston Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, is adopted by the Council and used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.
- (2) The Management Plan acts as an agenda for further consultation both locally and within the Council to identify priorities for action and the resources necessary for their implementation.
- (3) A further report is prepared for Committee after all 16 Appraisals and Management Plans have been reported to Cabinet regarding the need for and relative priorities for boundary changes and Article 4 directions between areas, and the financial and staffing implications arising.

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