OXHEY HALL CONSERVATION AREA
APPRAISAL

(October 2007)
OXHEY HALL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2.0 PLANNING HISTORY
3.0 HISTORY
4.0 CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA
5.0 AUDIT
   Listed buildings
   Locally Listed Buildings
   Elements of streetscape interest and views
   Detractors
6.0 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY REVIEW
7.0 SUMMARY
8.0 DEVELOPMENT
9.0 DEVELOPING A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
10.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX 1 - Historic Map
APPENDIX 2 – Oxhey Hall Conservation Area Boundary
APPENDIX 3 – Tree Preservation Orders within the Conservation Area
APPENDIX 4 - Aerial Photograph of Oxhey Hall Conservation Area
1.0 Introduction and Executive Summary

Executive summary

1.1 This document seeks to appraise the existing Oxhey Hall Conservation Area.

1.2 The overall important character of the conservation area is described later in the text. For the purposes of this summary, there are good examples of 1930’s “Metroland” architecture the important characteristics of which include: original doors, windows, window shutters to second floor, widespread use of traditional materials including brick, roof tiles and timber, colour of rendering, long back gardens and outstanding topography, trees, wildlife and a “rural feel”.

Rural views from Hillcroft Crescent

1.3 Three Rivers District Council has a duty under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (The Act) to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” The designation of a conservation area brings additional protection of trees, control over demolition and development as well as a requirement for a decision-maker, in exercising planning powers, to pay “special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area”.

1.4 This is reflected in the Three Rivers District Council Local Plan 1996-2011, which reaffirms the tests and considerations set out in PPG 15. Policies C1 relates to development within conservation areas, and C6 relates to demolition in conservation areas. This document was approved by the Executive Committee on the 29 October 2007, following consultation with residents. It is intended that the document will, in due course, be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in conjunction with the emerging Local Development Framework.
1.5 The Council is additionally required by The 1990 Act to keep conservation areas under review and to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for their preservation and enhancement.

**Purpose of the Statement**

1.6 Government policy guidance, provided in ‘PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment’ (PPG15, 1994) expresses the need for local authorities to assess the special interest, character and appearance of conservation areas to assist in setting out planning policy and to inform development control. English Heritage has published guidance on undertaking Conservation Area Appraisals (2005) and this appraisal has been undertaken in accordance with their advocated approach.

1.7 PPG15 sets out a presumption in favour of preserving buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of conservation areas. In addition the guidance recognises the contribution of traditional surfacing and street furniture to the character of an area.

1.8 The aims of this appraisal are therefore to:

- set out the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area and to describe the special character and appearance that it is desirable to preserve or enhance;

- examine the existing boundaries of the conservation area and consider the potential for other areas to be included and, if appropriate, where existing areas should be excluded; and

- identify areas subject to pressure for change that would be adverse to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a result of permitted development and identify any areas where the removal of permitted development rights would safeguard the essential character and appearance of the area.
1.9 It should be noted that the appraisal does not represent an exhaustive record of every building, feature or space within the conservation area and an omission should not be taken to imply that an element is of no interest.

2.0 Planning History

2.1 On 6th March 2006, Three Rivers District Council Planning Committee resolved that an area of the Oxhey Hall Estate, Oxhey Hall, Hertfordshire, should be designated as a Conservation Area in terms of Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

3.0 History

3.1 The extract from the 1877 Ordnance Survey map attached at Appendix 1, shows that this area was undeveloped until the Metropolitan Railway was built in the late 1880's, with the railway being pushed over ground through green fields on the edge of London beyond Finchley Road reaching the Three Rivers District area in 1887. These areas became known as Metro-land, the creation of the Metropolitan Railway's Publicity Department devised as a catchy
marketing brand name for the area north west of London in Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

3.2 Between 1919 and 1933 the Metropolitan Railways Country Estates Ltd developed a series of private housing estates all down the line at Neasden, Wembley Park, Northwick Park, Eastcote, Rayners Lane, Ruislip, Hillingdon, Pinner, Rickmansworth, Chorleywood, Amersham and Watford. In the early days the estates company built some houses itself, but the usual pattern was to lay out an estate and then sell plots to individual purchasers wishing to have a house built to their own specifications. Later on the design and construction was usually undertaken by other companies who would offer the prospective purchaser a choice of house sizes and styles at a range of prices. The Oxhey Hall Estate was developed around the same time and would have been directly linked to those estates built closer to the Metropolitan Railway stations.

3.3 The area is bounded on the north by the Brookdene Avenue, with Hampermill Lane and green belt open space to the west. To the east of the area is the edge of the South Oxhey housing estate and Oxhey Pavillion and open space which continues to the south of the area and includes Oxhey Pasture. Appendix 2 shows the existing conservation area boundary.

3.4 The existing conservation area comprises of 490 properties, encompassing the original area of the estate, in the following roads:-

- Raglan Gardens
- Oaklands Avenue
- Hillcroft Crescent
- Vivian Gardens

None of the houses within the existing area are Listed or Locally Listed.

3.5 The houses in the area include good examples of 1930’s “Metroland” architecture. They were built at a time when an increase in prosperity in the Three Rivers District area led to an extension of suitable dwellings; they are therefore, an important part of the areas development and social history.
3.6 The character of this area is determined by the houses being regularly spaced with access ways to gardens behind. The scale and proportions of the buildings are mainly regular and were designed to look larger than they actually are to give an increased impression of prosperity.

3.7 See Appendix 4 for an aerial photograph of the conservation area.

4.0 **Character and Appearance of the Area**

4.1 The character and appearance of an area depends on a variety of factors. Whilst the appearance of an area derives from its physical and visual characteristics (i.e. materials, heights of buildings, types and relationship of built form), character includes other less tangible effects relating to the experience of an area. This may include levels, types of activity and patterns of prevailing land uses. The character of an area may also differ according to the day of the week or time of day.

4.2 The assessment of the character and appearance of the area is based on the present day situation. Interest in an area may consequently derive from the combined effect of subsequent developments that replaced the earlier fabric as well from the original remaining buildings and street pattern and open spaces.
4.3 There is a presumption to retain buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the area. Buildings considered to be good examples of design have also been judged as making a positive contribution to the character of the area. Detractors are elements of the townscape that are considered to be so significantly out of scale or character with their surroundings that their replacement, with something of a more appropriate scale and massing or detailed architectural treatment would benefit the character and appearance of the area.

4.4 Detractors may also include unsightly gaps in frontages that disrupt the prevailing street pattern. Elements that are neutral broadly conform with the overriding scale, form, materials and elevational characteristics of their context. The integrity and nature of the context are consequently influential in making this judgement.

4.5 At present there are in excess of one hundred trees within the area, or on its borders, that are covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) as highlighted on the map at Appendix 3. In addition to these TPOs, permission is needed to lop, top or fell all the remaining substantial trees (defined as having a trunk diameter of 75mm or more at 1.5m above ground level) in the conservation area. The Council must be informed in writing of proposals to lop, top or fell trees. No such work shall be undertaken until six weeks notice has been given to the Council which provides an opportunity for the making of a TPO should it be considered appropriate. If a tree is dead, dying or dangerous emergency works may be carried out. As the onus is on the landowner to prove that the work was necessary, the owner is advised to consult the district council in advance in such cases.

The trimming of existing hedges does not require permission. However, work to a line of trees which was planted as a hedge or boundary which has not been pruned as a hedge will require consent.

4.6 As previously stated the houses in this area are predominantly of a 1930’s “Metroland” architectural style. The houses within the area are a mix of semi detached and detached properties built using traditional materials including brick, roof tiles and timber, with rendering to exterior walls. Many of the buildings have retained some of their original features including front doors many including coloured glass, decorative window shutters to second floor front outlooks and in some cases, predominantly Oaklands Avenue, exposed timberwork to front outlooks. The roofs are predominantly covered in the original roof tiles, all of which aids in maintaining the original character of the area.
4.7 The majority of the original properties in the area have long rear gardens which provide an important part of the local environment contributing to the distinctive character of the area derived from the age and design of the estate. This in conjunction with the outstanding topography and surrounding greenbelt and open spaces combine to provide the “rural feel” of the area.

Sub-Areas

4.8 There are no sub-areas.

5.0 Audit

5.1 An initial audit of the fabric of the Area has been undertaken to identify buildings that contribute to the area’s character and appearance, elements of streetscape interest and other elements that detract from its character and appearance. It is considered that a more detailed audit at an individual property level throughout the Conservation Area should be undertaken as part of the development of a subsequent Management Strategy.

5.2 Currently there are no buildings in the conservation area included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest or which have been designated as Locally Listed Buildings. However, the
majority of buildings grouped contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Whilst a significant proportion of the buildings may have experienced minor alterations and modernisation over the years, they still contribute as part of the group and retain much of their period character maintaining that of the area as a whole. The assessment of whether a building makes a positive contribution to the special architectural and historic interest of a conservation area is based on guidance provided in English Heritage’s publication ‘Conservation Area Appraisals’.

Example of streetscape, Oaklands Avenue

5.3 **Elements of streetscape interest and important views.** The character and the appearance of the Conservation Area are not solely a function of its buildings. There are many important views throughout the conservation area.

5.4 Elements within the public realm, such as original pavement materials, boundary walls, signage and vegetation contribute greatly to the area’s quality, character and appearance. The following elements of the area’s streetscape are considered to be of interest:

- mature hedges in front of a number of houses
- large mature trees throughout the estate
- attractive views across open green belt land
- attractive architectural details

5.5 **The Detractors.** Inevitably there are buildings (and street furniture) that detract from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This may be due to a building’s scale, materials, relationship to the street or due to the impact of alterations and extensions. There are also structures and elements of streetscape (e.g. visual clutter from excessive signage or advertisements) that impinge on the character and quality of the Conservation Area.

5.6 It was noted that there has been a significant amount of patching carried out to the pavements, crossovers (the majority of which are original) and highways which has been finished in differing materials detracting from the appearance of the area. It was also noted that in addition there remains a large level of potholes, deterioration and need for repair to the pavements and highways across the estate which further detracts from the area.
5.7 The primary cause of change to the character and appearance of residential streets has been incremental changes to domestic properties. Much of the development that has occurred does not, however, fall within the remit of planning control. The main issues are set out below, and therefore the appropriateness of an “Article 4(2) Direction will have to be considered for the Conservation Area, this could be undertaken as part of the development of a Management Strategy.

5.8 **Original features**: There is significant evidence within the Conservation Area of the loss of original and traditional features. This includes the replacement of original doors and windows, the removal of original features such as window shutters, the addition of porch and new side structures to buildings, the addition of tiling to bay windows and boundary walls and the addition of varilux windows to front facing roofs.

5.9 **Painting**: In a small number of cases the painting of rendering and brickwork has occurred on some properties within the Conservation Area which whilst not inappropriate is out of character with the surrounding buildings. This has had a detrimental effect on the integrity and consistency of frontages in the area.

5.10 **Building Extensions**: There have been a number of building extensions of varying sizes added to properties within the conservation area and although these have in most cases been designed to replicate the features of the original buildings the use of modern building materials has in some cases had a detrimental effect on the visual continuity of the property frontages.

5.11 **Hardstandings**: The introduction of various types and styles of hardstanding within the front gardens of a significant number of properties to enable additional parking (where space allows) has led to the loss of front garden walls and a reduction in the amount of vegetation on the frontage in a number of locations. The effect of this is to disrupt the visual continuity and enclosure of the frontage. This erodes the character and appearance of the street and has a detrimental effect on the visual continuity of the property frontages.
5.12 **Infill Housing/New Developments**: There have been a number of sites within the conservation area where infill housing has been added to existing street fronts after the original development of the estate and a large Laing development of approximately 20 properties has been added to Oaklands Avenue on the site of the original playing fields. Whilst the impact of the small level of infill housing to the estate has been relatively low in terms of the character of the area, the new development does significantly detract from the visual character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

![Laing Development in Oaklands Avenue](image1)

6.0 **Conservation Area Boundary review.**

6.1 The current conservation area boundaries encompass the original area of the estate. It has been noted that only a proportion of the properties in Vivian Gardens and none within Vivian Close have been included within the existing conservation area. Specific attention has been paid to these properties as well as those on the boundaries within Hampermill Lane and Brookdene Avenue in the consideration of revising the conservation area.

![View of properties in Vivian Close](image2)

6.2 The properties on the boundaries of the existing conservation area do not appear to have been part of the original Oxhey Hall development and as such do not demonstrate the same 1930’s “Metroland” features as those original properties currently included. Inclusion of these properties would not enhance the distinctive character and distinguishing qualities of the existing conservation area and it is questionable as to whether these properties meet the applied criteria in the existing designation.
6.3 It is considered that existing legislation and policies are sufficient to regulate further development proposals in the areas surrounding the conservation area, specifically the Three Rivers Local Plan 1996-2011 Policy H14 states that the Council will seek to protect the character and residential amenity of existing housing areas from backland or infill development and Policy GEN3 provides to ensure that applications for development satisfy design and landscape criteria and accord with relevant parking standards. In addition Appeal Decisions in 2005 and 2006 should provide precedent in the control of further development to the areas surrounding the conservation area.

6.4 As such this appraisal does not consider that further boundary reviews are required at this time. However, it is recommended that the matters outlined above be given further specific consideration as part of the subsequent development of a Management Strategy for the Conservation Area.

7.0 Summary

7.1 The Conservation Area is an important planned development, all of the original houses remain.

7.2 The fact that the 19th Century Ordnance Survey maps show that this area was undeveloped until the arrival of the Metropolitan Railway in the Three Rivers District area is important, as it indicates that this was a planned estate on completely undeveloped land.

7.3 There is a widespread and overwhelming use of traditional and high quality materials and this is important.

7.4 An Article 4 Direction requires applicants to seek planning permission from the Council for a range of works which could normally be done without planning permission in order to safeguard the special characteristics of an area where there is a clear and immediate threat to the amenity of the area. These could
include the removal of permitted development rights for one or more of the following:

- Alteration, installation or replacement of doors and windows
- Alterations to a roof/chimney or removal of a chimney
- Any enlargement, improvement, alteration such as an extension or changes to architectural features (including building a porch)
- Provision of a hard surface on driveways for parking
- The erection, construction, improvement, alteration of a fence, gate, wall etc
- Exterior painting of previously unpainted surfaces or changes of external colour schemes, or covering walls by render or like finishes
- The installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite dish or antenna

Due to the high level of modernisation that has already been undertaken and the incremental changes to domestic properties that has occurred outside the remit of planning control, the appropriateness of an “Article 4(2) Direction will have to be considered for the Conservation Area in the development of the Management Strategy. (See paragraph 9.0)

8.0 Development

8.1 What development is permitted in a Conservation Area?

8.2 “Permitted Development” rights normally mean that some domestic alterations may be carried out without requiring planning permission. However, these rights are more restricted in Conservation Areas. For example, permission is required for satellite dishes, dormer windows and other alterations to a roof as well as external cladding and works to trees.

8.3 No work is automatically ruled out by Conservation Area designation. However, it does impose an additional requirement on residents to apply to the Council for consent and permission for certain works, and in some cases a specific Conservation Area Consent is needed.

8.4 All applications for planning permission in a Conservation Area are considered from the conservation point of view and can be refused on conservation grounds alone. This also applies to development proposals in the vicinity of a Conservation Area. As with a planning application, an applicant has a right to appeal against a refusal, or against any conditions attached to a permission or consent.

8.5 Criteria for Development

The Three Rivers Local Plan sets out the planning policies for conservation areas and it is recommended that anyone wishing to carry out any alterations should refer to the policies in the Conservation of the Built Heritage Section of the Local Plan. Below are the main policies relevant to development in a Conservation Area.
8.6 **Policy C1 Development within Conservation Areas**

Within Conservation Areas, development (including new shop fronts, or other alterations which are considered by the Council to have a material affect on the appearance of a building) should preserve or enhance the Conservation Area and in particular:-

i. Be sympathetic to the architectural features of the building, adjacent buildings, and wider Conservation Area in terms of siting, proportion, bulk, scale, form, height, colour, materials, elevational design, vertical or horizontal emphasis, and detailing.

ii. Respect existing landscape features (including characteristic plot boundary treatments) and the relationship of buildings to plot boundaries.

iii. Be acceptable in terms of the impact on traffic generation (having regard to existing and past traffic generation where information is available) and parking provision on townscape and the character of the Conservation Area.

iv. Not adversely affect important spaces in the Conservation Area.

v. Not adversely affect features of archaeological and historic significance, including historic boundaries.

8.7 **Demolition**

Conservation Area Consent is needed for the demolition of buildings and in some cases for the demolition of parts of buildings. (Including chimneys).

The Council will give high priority to retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Any one of the nine criteria/characteristics listed in the Three Rivers Local Plan 1996 – 2011 (Demolition in Conservation Areas, Section 3.25, Page 50) may provide the basis for considering that a building makes a positive contribution.

8.8 **Policy C.6 Demolition in Conservation Areas** (Three Rivers Local Plan 1996 – 2011) states that proposals to demolish such buildings will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- The condition and cost of repairing the building outweigh the buildings importance and the value derived from its continued use (less weight will be given to the cost of repair where a building has been deliberately neglected).

- Adequate efforts have been made to retain the building in its present use or a compatible alternative use, including freehold sale at a realistic price on the open market.
• Exceptionally a proposed scheme benefits the community which outweighs preservation

• Any replacement building would preserve or enhance the Conservation Area.

• Consent for demolition (including demolition of a building which makes little or no contribution to a Conservation Area) will not be given unless there are detailed acceptable plans for redevelopment

If the reason for proposed demolition is the poor condition of the building, applications for Conservation Area Consent should be accompanied by a structural survey.

8.9 **Television Satellite Dishes**

Planning permission for the installation of satellite dishes will not be required provided that:

• There will be no more than one dish on the building or in the garden

• The dish does not exceed 90cm measured across any dimension of the antenna (excluding any projecting feed element, the reinforcing rim and supporting brackets).

• If the dish is installed on a roof, it does not protrude above the highest part of the roof

• The installation is not on a chimney stack, nor on the wall or roof slope fronting the road or public footpath.

8.10 **Trees**

Permission is needed to lop, top, or fell any substantial trees (defined as having a trunk diameter of 75mm or more at 1.5m above ground level) in the Conservation Area. If you wish to carry out work on a tree you need to give six weeks written notification of intent to carry out the works. This allows time for a tree officer to visit the site and make an assessment of whether the work is appropriate. In certain situations a Tree Preservation Order may be placed on a tree within a conservation area to prevent inappropriate works being carried out.

9.0 **Developing a Management Strategy**

9.1 BVPI 219c formalises the requirement for the Council to draw up and publish proposals for addressing and implementing recommendations for action contained in the Appraisal. This includes:
• policy guidance to enable planning applications to be processed
• consideration of resources needed to sustain historic environment
• mechanisms for monitoring change
• enforcement strategy to address unauthorised development
• use of Article 4 powers
• action to ensure repairs of buildings at risk
• enhancement/regeneration schemes if appropriate
• maintenance of highways and pavements to preserve original features in accordance with the overall conservation area
• strategy for management and protection of important trees, greenery and open spaces
• what the resource implications are for the Council
• community consultation on the Draft Appraisal and the Management Strategy

9.2 In line with the Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas published by English Heritage in conjunction with the Planning Advisory Service, it is considered that the development of the Management Strategy should be based on the character appraisal that is provided by this document. As such it is not proposed that any detailed work should be undertaken on this Strategy until there has been full consultation undertaken on the Conservation Area Appraisal and a finalised document has been approved by the Executive Committee of Three Rivers District Council.

10.0 Bibliography


Statutory Instruments