

5.13

WOODFORD BRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS Pt. 2



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

9 September 2014

5.13 MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS - Part 2.

This Part 2 should be read alongside the generic Part 1 document. Together they form the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Management Proposals.

5.13.1 Summary of special interest

The Character Appraisal for Woodford Bridge Conservation Area states that the special quality of the Conservation Area lies partly in that the area is a remnant of an early (medieval) forest settlement rich in historic and architectural interest. Woodford Bridge is the earliest and easternmost part of Woodford, and is an 800 year old settlement which still retains the two areas of open land around which it was formed. These remaining greens are the surviving remnants of an ancient landscape which are the elements of greatest heritage significance today (including the ancient pond on the upper green). The open spaces serve as attractive green areas and recreational spaces for a now essentially built up part of the borough. Buildings around the two ancient greens span a period of over 200 years and represent many different styles, helping to tell the storey of the historic development of the area.

Woodford Bridge Conservation Area today retains a strong sense of rurality, and this can be attributed to the wide green open spaces which provide a setting and important visual separation between the different groups of buildings.

The key factors that give Woodford Bridge Conservation Area (hereafter the Conservation Area) its special interest are summarised in **Section 4.0 (page 61) of the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Character Appraisal**. These factors constitute the distinguishing characteristics which make the Conservation Area unique and which underpin the character and appearance of the area “which it is desirable to preserve and enhance” through management action.

5.13.2 Conservation Area boundaries

Woodford Bridge Conservation Area was designated in 1970, but a significant degree of development has taken place in Woodford Bridge both prior to its designation and subsequently that render the boundary of the Conservation Area out-of-date. Because of this the Character Appraisal recommends that some parts of the Conservation Area are removed and other areas are included within a redesignated Conservation Area.

In summary, areas around Morgan Way, Purleigh Avenue, and Henwood Side are now dedesignated and areas around Stoneycroft/Gainsborough Road, Oakwood Close, and Sandsway are now included. The detailed changes to the Conservation Area boundary are outlined below in section 5.13.4. and are designed to ensure it has logical and defensible boundaries.

5.13.3 Summary of issues

The particular issues affecting the Conservation Area and which need to be addressed are set out in **Section 5.0 (page 63) of the Character Appraisal**. These are summarised as:

1/ Intrusive modern development harming its character or, where outside the Conservation Area, its setting. Some recent development has a negative townscape value as it is either out of scale or out of character (as per the blocks of flat in Character Area I), or it fails to address the principal street scene (as is the case with some of the modern housing within Character Area K).

2/ Many good buildings have suffered over the years from a combination of poorly designed unsympathetic alterations and/or overly large extensions.

3/ A major issue in the Conservation Area is the poor design (and in some cases, condition) of the shopfronts. It was chiefly this issue that led English Heritage to place the Conservation Area on its Heritage at Risk Register.

4/ Loss of architectural detailing and original materials: Many of the late 19th and early 20th Century houses have been adversely affected by changes to materials and detailing. These include,

5/ The removal of slate and plain clay tile roofs and their replacement with concrete tiles;

6/ The addition of grit render to facing brickwork;

7/ The replacement of original timber windows and doors with PVCu or other unsympathetic equivalents;

8/ The enclosing of purposed-designed open front porches or the creation of porches on terraces of otherwise uninterrupted frontages,

9/ The removal of chimney pots or whole chimneys

10/ The conversion of gardens for off-street parking: An increasing number of houses have lost their front boundary walls or fences, etc, to create off-street parking. The net gain in parking space is often negligible from this change (given the on-street space which has to be kept to allow for ingress/egress) but the resulting visual damage to the area is significant.

11/ The loss of front boundary walls creates a lack of enclosure along the street and a loss of the rhythm of property division, that supports the strong rhythm of building frontages.

12/ Paving over of front gardens has also resulted in the loss of areas of greenery that made an important contribution to the semi-rural appeal of the area (see photograph 1 below, for example).

Issues 2/ - 12/ can be brought under planning control with an up-to-date and rigorously applied Article 4 direction. Steps to seek the restoration of lost vernacular features may also be sought through local policy, grants, persuasion and appropriate Conservation Area Management Proposals designed to both preserve and enhance.

5.13.4. Management Proposals

1. Need for action

Based on the detailed assessment provided by the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Character Appraisal and the problems and pressures identified by it, the

following management action is proposed for the Conservation Area in order to preserve and enhance its special interest:

2. Planning policy and the duty to 'preserve and enhance'

The combined Part 1 and this Part 2 Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Management Proposals satisfy the statutory requirements of s.71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. They are now adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) within the Local Development Plan. The Council will address through the implementation of its local planning policies and these Conservation Area Management Proposals the issues exposed by the *Wirksworth* case (see Appendix 1 of Part 1 of these Conservation Area Management Proposals); that the unfortunate damage done over recent years to houses and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area shall not provide any precedent that might allow further damage, nor be an obstacle to the restoration of lost features. The Article 4 Direction detailed at 5. below will bring all such 'minor development' matters within the Council's control.

The Council's planning policies and this SPD are the necessary policy framework that will empower the Council to arrest and reverse the erosion of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and to seek to work with owners to restore the lost architectural details and traditional materials of the properties, frontages and boundaries. In this way the issues detailed within the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Character Appraisal and at 5.13.3 above will be addressed and, over time, the special interest of the Conservation Area will be incrementally restored. Further comment on the duty to 'preserve and enhance' can be found at Appendix 1 of the Part 1 Conservation Area Management Proposals document.

These policies and this SPD will not be used to prevent appropriate development and good well-designed solutions will be sought that seek to deliver the best possible level of owner's and businesses' expectations that is compatible with the duty to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. An example might be that future insulation of windows should be through secondary glazing or, where original windows have already been lost, through double glazed timber windows that match the original pattern and the reuse. Similarly, for dwellings, off-street parking shall not occupy more than 40% of the frontage and be in traditional and where possible, permeable materials and that the remaining frontage should be restored as front garden.

3. Conservation area boundary changes

As detailed above under 5.13.2 the Character Appraisal for Woodford Bridge noted that the original boundary was out-of-date and recommended that some parts of the existing Conservation Area are deleted and other parts currently not part of the designation are brought into the revised Conservation Area boundary.

The following are now deleted from the Conservation Area:

- a) Houses at Westfield Park Drive, where it was recommended that only those buildings fronting onto or with a direct visual relationship with the Lower

Green be retained within the revised Conservation Area boundary as none were significant in their own right or as a group, and none had visually or historically significant curtilages.

- b) Houses at Meadgate Avenue as they made no contribution to the architectural and historic character of the Conservation Area.
- c) Flats 13-24 and 25-36 Wallers Close as they made no contribution to the architectural and historic character of the Conservation Area.

The following are now included in the Conservation Area:

- a) Two-storey Victorian terraces in the area including Stoneycroft Road and Gainsborough Road. These are well preserved and form part of the earliest phase of development in the area representing its transition from a village into a London suburb. They are of historic interest and worthy of conserving.
- b) Oakwood Close, which is one of the earliest inter-war developments to have taken place at Woodford Bridge. The development here is included because of its unusual almost symmetrical cul-de-sac plan form, its relatively high level of architectural detailing and the fact that it remains very well preserved. There is a strong sense of identity here that positively contributes to the character of the Conservation Area.
- c) Dwellings at Sands Way and Gwynne Park Avenue. Properties here round off the Conservation Area boundary in a logical manner and provide the backdrop for important landscape elements within the Conservation Area. Visually they are also linked with The Green and the Prince Regent Hotel, and are considered to make a positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- d) Minor boundary change to follow the rear property boundaries of the recent development at 5-12 Chapelmount Road.

The above changes are designed to give the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area logical and defensible boundaries.

4. Shop-fronts/Commercial properties

Improvements to the poorly designed shop-fronts at the shopping parades are viewed as a priority. Updated shop-front design guidance and robust application of LDF policies in the consideration of any planning application may achieve incremental enhancement over time as shop-fronts are replaced. More proactive action is likely to achieve quicker results. However, the availability of grant funding for replacement shopfronts is likely to be limited in the current economic climate. Whilst it is anticipated that some funding for grants may be available (possibly through a partnership scheme with English Heritage and other agencies), other sources of funding will also need to be investigated and secured if significant improvements are to be achieved. Individual traders will be encouraged by the Council to co-ordinate their efforts with regard to shop-front enhancements.

5. Article 4 Direction

The Character Appraisal shows that there has been a significant loss of key and important architectural features of houses, for example to windows, doors, porches, front garden space and walls/fences. Much of this harm is through the uncontrolled exercise of householder permitted development rights, whereby householders can make such alterations and replacements without needing to get planning permission first. It should be noted that flats and commercial premises do not have these rights, and such alterations require the benefit of planning permission.

Front gardens and original walls are essential features that contribute to the special architectural or historic interest of the Conservation Area. Regrettably, many in the Conservation Area have been demolished and front gardens paved over or resurfaced to accommodate vehicles for off-street parking.

Consequently, and in order to prevent further erosion of the special interest of the Conservation Area, it is proposed that a new, comprehensive Article 4 Direction is made covering all houses, properties and shopfronts in the Conservation Area. This will help prevent the further loss of original detail on buildings, the conversion of front gardens into hard standing and the loss or inappropriate replacement of original front boundary walls or fences. The Direction will require planning permission to be sought for most alterations to buildings and frontages including to change windows, shopfronts, doors, roofs and roof coverings, to paint or render facades, to pave frontages or front gardens, to erect, alter or demolish a boundary fence or wall on frontages of dwelling houses that face a highway, footpath or public open space and to erect solar and PV panels.

6. Design Guidance

Currently Woodford Bridge Conservation Area does not have specific design guidance to direct local residents and businesses on appropriate design for alteration and new development. Whilst design guide can be useful in directing future development, resources available to produce such documents are severely limited at the present time. It is proposed, therefore, that existing/updated generic guidance (including refreshed shop-front guidance) is utilised for the time being and that the quality of development is monitored over the period of this Management Proposals document with a view to considering the preparation of design guidance as part of a future review if necessary.

7. Highways management

Streetscape design is as important to any area as the architecture of the built environment. The public realm in Woodford Bridge is currently cluttered and does not reinforce local distinctiveness. The pavement finishes and street furniture of Woodford Bridge Conservation Area should complement and not compete with important aspects of its historic character.

In response to the issues outlined above a more coordinated approach between relevant services within the Council and between the Council and other relevant

agencies could provide a street environment that is convenient for traders, safe and in keeping with its surroundings. The aim should be to service the public realm and to manage traffic in a sympathetic and discrete manner. There may also be opportunities in Woodford Bridge to enhance the public realm improving the situation for groups such as the mobility impaired and cyclists to encourage active travel choices for local trips.

Some rationalisation of forecourts, paving and layby parking arrangement was undertaken in 2013 in the vicinity of the shops opposite the lower green. This had a moderate positive effect but did not make the most of the opportunity to enhance the character of the area.

The Council's Highways Engineering and Transportation service will in Year 1 implement a substantial scheme that will improve and enhance the public realm in the vicinity of the Lower Green. Such public realm enhancements will help secure the removal of Woodford Bridge from the English Heritage 'Heritage at risk' register.

The Council has also approved a Streetscape Guidance manual that sets a strategic design approach to works to the highways and footways in Conservation Areas together with other streetscape issues. (See section 3.7 in Part 1). This will help promote the maintenance of the key characteristics of the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area, and avoid unnecessary street clutter, signage and road markings in the future.

1. Care and management of street trees and verges

Mature trees (street or otherwise) are an important element of the character of the Conservation Area. The Council follows its Tree Planting and Maintenance Policy (October 1996) in relation to all public trees within the Borough. This has established the principle that any necessary future replanting will be with species that accord with the prevailing species in that locale and the character. (Section 3.9 in Part 1 of these Management Proposals gives further details).

Woodford Bridge Conservation Area retains large open areas or greens, which as well as providing the setting of the Conservation Area and retaining a strong verdant, rural ambience, act as *green lungs* for the area, helping improve the air quality of the area, providing important wildlife habitats, while the trees on the greens provide shade and shelter from the elements, and give a clear and attractive indication of the change of the seasons.

The two key, ancient greens within the Conservation Area are effectively protected from adverse development by virtue of the fact that they are designated as CR1 Land within the LDF, and there is a presumption against development on identified open spaces, whether they are in public or private ownership. In some instances the open space designation is reinforced by other policy designations, particularly if it comprises a significant natural heritage or landscape feature. LDF policy *CR1 – Protection of Important Urban Open Space* states:

'The Council will safeguard Open Space identified on the Proposals Map and listed in Schedule 6 by refusing development proposals on such open space, other than where supportive of and ancillary to the purpose of that open space.'

Mature trees and green infrastructure are important to the character of the area. There are 207 trees in in the area in Council ownership, 50 in Highways, 50 within housing sites and 107 within Vision controlled land. Many of these are notable, mature Lime, Ash and Horse Chestnut specimens.

Many of the trees in the area are covered by historic Tree Preservation Orders which may benefit from being reviewed and updated. In addition, it is suggested that areas now removed from the Conservation Area are surveyed with a view to protecting any trees of merit which may help to provide a green setting for the Conservation Area.

5.13.5 Management Strategy

Over the next five years, the Council will undertake the following management actions:

Year 1

- Make an Article 4 Direction that will prevent further loss of original architectural details, help facilitate the restoration of lost architectural details, prevent loss of front boundaries and the conversion of front gardens into hard standing for cars, etc.
- Working with the Conservation Advisory Panel and local groups, investigate new ways of monitoring and recording the Conservation Area within available resources.
- Introduce a requirement that applications for Planning Permission within the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area should include a Conservation Statement or Plan that justifies the impact of the proposals on the affected heritage asset and the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
- Consider carefully whether any notified trees should be covered by a Tree Preservation Order.
- Ensure any replacement trees are in accordance with the Tree Planting and Maintenance Policy and of a species that is compatible with the immediate environment and in accordance with the prevailing character or appearance.
- Update relevant Tree Preservation Orders and consider new orders for any trees of high amenity value within areas to be removed from the Conservation Area.

Year 2

- Survey, review and monitor works and development within the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area.
- Review and monitor the design quality of proposals with planning permission.
- Review appeal decisions.

- Consider all relevant planning applications against up-dated or existing guidance on shopfronts within conservation areas.
- Assuming grant funding secured; implement the highway improvement works at Woodford Bridge with a view to enhancing the character of the area as described above.
- The Council will investigate the possibility of obtaining grant funding (potentially from English Heritage, the LGA and/or the HLF) in order to regenerate parts of the Conservation Area, paying particular attention to the shopfronts on Chigwell Road

Year 3

- Survey, review and monitor works and development within the Conservation Area.
- Review the effectiveness of the Article 4 Direction.
- Review and monitor the design quality of proposals with planning permission.
- Review appeal decisions.
- Develop any future programmed highways maintenance or traffic works within the Conservation Area in accordance with the Redbridge Streetscape Guidance and the Character Appraisal document.
- Review overall effectiveness of Management Proposals in the maintenance and safeguarding of highways and other trees, greenery and the herbaceous planted verges within the Conservation Area.

Year 4

- Survey, review and monitor works and development within the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area.
- Review and monitor the design quality of proposals with planning permission.
- Review appeal decisions.

Year 5

- Survey, review and monitor works and development within the Woodford Bridge Conservation Area.
- Review and monitor the design quality of proposals with planning permission.
- Review appeal decisions.
- Review overall effectiveness of Management Proposals in the maintenance and safeguarding of highways and other trees, greenery and the planted areas within the Conservation Area.
- Conclude on monitoring of the quality of development based on use of existing/updated generic guidance (including refreshed shop-front guidance) over the period of the management plan with a view to including the preparation of design guidance as part of a future review if necessary.

Consultation Statement

The Borough-wide Conservation Area Management Proposals (Part 1), and the Area-specific Woodford Bridge Conservation Area Management Proposals (Part 2), were put to extensive public consultation between 3 February and 28 March 2014, in line with the requirements of s.71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Borough's Statement of Community Involvement. The required statutory public meeting happened on the 10 February 2014 within the Conservation Area.

The consultation responses, which were very positive, together with the finalised Conservation Area Management Proposals, were considered by the Neighbourhoods and Communities Service Committee on the 3 September 2014 and the recommendations agreed. The Conservation Area Management Proposals were then formally approved by the Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration on the 9 September 2014.

The Borough-wide Management Proposals (Part 1) and the Area-specific Management Proposals (Part 2s) for The Bungalow Estate, Woodford Bridge and Woodford Broadway Conservation Areas are now a Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Plan.