

## PROBLEMS, THREATS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

16.0 The term “conservation” reflects a dynamic rather than the static concern in the protection of the historic environment. The broad role of conservation is in the management of change sensitively to ensure the retention of a finite historic resource in a way which does not compromise its integrity, while guaranteeing its economic well being. These principles must guide the preservation and enhancement of the Nether Edge Conservation Area. The challenge is to achieve this in an area subject to considerable development pressure. The various dilemmas and strategic issues which the Area is facing are discussed below

## USES AND ACTIVITY

17.0 Despite the residential character of the area, its proximity to the city centre, its attractive character and the generous proportions of many properties has generated pressure for non-residential uses. Such uses have also tended to result in problems of car parking, noise, traffic and general disturbance. However, there has also been a concentration of non-residential uses along some streets, such as Wostenholm and Montgomery Roads which has eroded their residential character. The Council’s policy has therefore been to resist further specified non-residential uses and this appraisal suggests that this policy should be strengthened.

17.1 Many large properties have also been sub-divided into flats or let for multiple occupancy, or changed use to hotels and care homes. The proliferation of such uses has tended to erode the external character of some properties, with increased prominent forecourt parking, intrusive fire escapes (Fig.33c), dormer windows and poorly maintained gardens. There has been a slow reversal of this trend as many properties return to use as houses as demand for housing close to the city centre increases.

## URBAN STRUCTURE AND MOVEMENT

18.0 At the macro level, the urban structure of the area has not changed in its fundamentals other than through the reinforcement of existing patterns as the area has developed incrementally over the years. The area is not subject to any major proposals that would significantly alter its wider structure and relationship with its surroundings. Any proposals for major change are unlikely and would be resisted.

18.1 The stable character of the area means that problems of orientation, which are rooted in the urban structure of the area, cannot be resolved although they can be ameliorated. Improved signage and street naming could play a part in this.

18.2 The problem of rat-running is a product of the desirable permeability in the area. This problem requires further assessment from a highways point of view. The speed of traffic along some roads is also of concern and further traffic calming may be considered ensuring that features and signage are sensitive to the character of the area.

## LANDSCAPE SETTING

19.0 The main threat to the established landscape of the area comes from the potential loss of trees. This is discussed in more detail below (see Trees Parks and Gardens). The loss of trees would radically alter the appearance of the area within the landscape, although any change is likely to be gradual and unnoticeable over the short term.

19.1 A further threat is from development significantly exceeding the height of the tree canopy. The intrusion of buildings on the city’s skyline has occurred in other residential areas, such as Endcliffe and Broomhill, and this has been highly damaging in landscape terms. Such development would seriously damage the landscape setting of the area, which is currently free of such intrusive development, and would establish an unwelcome precedent.

19.2 Nevertheless, the complex and undulating topography and extensive number of trees creates opportunities to absorb new development within the landscape, provided this does not result in the loss of mature trees and planting, or interrupt the undeveloped skyline, compromise residential amenity, townscape or spatial character.

## **ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING MATERIALS**

20.0 Post war development within the area has been of variable architectural quality. This has sometimes been the result of a failure to respect the existing architectural style, resulting in incompatible development damaging to the character of the local area. This is a particularly common feature of 1960s and 70s development in modernist style (Fig.33a). In particular apartment development, usually in much simplified brick construction with flat roofs and large landscape windows, pays little attention to the form of local development or the characteristic grain of the area.

20.1 More recently, however, new development has sought to mimic the existing Victorian architecture without a rigorous understanding of its principles and lacking the detailing and craftsmanship in its execution. The resulting pastiche has tended to simply dilute the existing character of the area instead of either preserving or enhancing it in a positive sense (Fig.33j). Infill development often fails to respect the scale, vertical emphasis and hierarchical character of villa development (Fig.33d).

20.2 While the area's strong spatial and visual context means that it has absorbed the worse architecture without significant loss of character, damage would result by allowing further inappropriate development. Moreover, the opportunity to enhance the area is missed.

20.3 Sensitive contemporary architecture need not be incompatible with the existing historical context provided creativity is allied to an understanding of the principles of scale, form, rhythm, proportion and materials and the wider spatial and townscape qualities which underlie the local context. Such contextual understanding and the

way it informs the proposed design is of crucial importance and requires the skill of a fully trained architect.

20.4 Many properties are well maintained with original features intact or being restored, to the credit of their owners. However, the incremental loss of original materials and detailing continues to erode the character and appearance of the area. The replacement of timber sash windows and timber doors with Upvc alternatives has been especially damaging to the integrity and appearance of many villas (Fig.33h and i).

20.5 Part of the challenge is to persuade residents of the value of maintaining their properties in their original condition. Traditional building materials and techniques have withstood the test of time, with enduring qualities consistent with principles of sustainable development. Materials are more robust and maintainable than many modern alternatives and better suited functionally to the physical characteristic of older buildings. Moreover, increasingly, properties in original condition are more sought after, due to growing appreciation of their traditional qualities, and this is reflected in higher property values. Persuading residents through appropriate guidance and advice is therefore of great importance for effective conservation.

20.6 However, to prevent further incremental damage to the proposed Conservation Area, a major objective is the introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction restricting permitted development rights for alterations to buildings fronting highways (i.e. areas visible from a public point of view). This would mean that changes such removal and replacement of sash windows, decorative barge boards and slate roofs, would require planning permission.

## **TREES, PARKS AND GARDENS**

21.0 The main threat to the established landscape of the area comes from the potential decline and loss of trees, the majority of which have reached maturity. Part of this problem derives from development of infill sites where there is pressure for removing trees and developing in close proximity to them.

**Fig.33** Problematic development within Nether Edge.



**(a)** Sheffield Hallam University - ugly modern extension to attractive Edwardian former school.



**(b)** Infill between two fine villas damaging their "separate" character. Note the poorly proportioned and detailed windows.



**(c)** Flat conversions of large houses often create the need for intrusive fire escapes.



**(d)** Modern infill with different scale, roof pitches and window proportions to neighbouring Victorian Villas. The close proximity of the new house also impinges on the setting of the villa.



**(e)** Strap pointing - offensive in appearance and damaging to stonework.



**(f)** Creation of vehicular accesses can break the continuity of boundary walls and isolate gate posts.



**(g)** Roof dormers which damage traditional roof forms.



**(h)** The replacement of timber windows, doors, porches, soffits and barge boards with UPVC affects the traditional character & appearance of historic buildings.



**(i)** Bay windows altered to Upvc (above). Compare an original timber bay retaining its fine decorative mouldings & sash windows (inset).



**(j)** The proportion of floor heights, bay windows and dormers are at odds with the local character despite attempts to copy the local style.



**(k)** Some aspects of the Victorian street layout were far from ideal and have occasionally resulted in the close relationship of villas and unattractive space in between.



**(l)** The area around the former tram terminus, now occupied by a shop and garages, would benefit from environmental improvement works.

21.1 While generally in good condition the nature of their environment means that trees have not been able to grow as they would in a more natural environment. Many trees are forest species which mean they are of considerable size and, consequently, the majority have been crown reduced. The latter is usually carried out to limit the size of the tree and to reduce its canopy and consequent shading and interference with nearby buildings or walls. Occasionally where there is structural damage this results in the removal of the tree. Sometimes crown reduction is poorly executed, injuring the form and health of the tree.

21.2 The Council's policies has been to protect trees and landscaping which contribute to the character of the area. Conservation area designation gives automatic protection to trees over 75mm in diameter. Tree Preservation Orders must be applied to trees where applications to fell or lop have been refused. Exceptionally where a tree is removed a replacement tree of same species is generally required. The latter is important to the continuity of character in the area because non-forest species are typically of different scale, form and appearance.

21.3 Given the maturity of trees within the area the challenge is the management and, where necessary, removal and replacement of trees in poor condition. Without the rigorous application of this approach the visual and historic character of the conservation area will be compromised. Moreover, the wider environmental contribution of trees and planted areas adds further weight and policy should reflect the interdependence of nature conservation, landscape, air quality and the built environment.

21.4 Finally, the hardsurfacing of front gardens, removal of planting and the intrusion of car parking is an ongoing problem which does not currently require planning permission yet seriously erodes the green character of the conservation area Fig.33(f). In the absence of statutory controls it is recommended that the implications of establishing an Article 4(2) direction be considered (see "Floorscape and boundaries" below for a fuller discussion of the issues and

## FLOORSCAPE AND BOUNDARIES

22.0 The designation of conservation area creates automatic protection for walls and trees above a certain size. While many walls above one metre are protected within conservation areas those below are unprotected even after designation, as is the creation of a means of access and hardstanding. The formation of multiple and double width openings is particularly damaging in the area. The creation of visibility splays to highway standards for new infill development can also appear intrusive and incongruous.

22.1 In the current absence of statutory controls it is recommended that the removal of permitted development rights for the demolition of such walls be included within an Article 4 Direction. The incremental nature of such development means that damage can be done by permitting apparently small-scale development which cumulatively erodes the character of the area over time. It is particularly damaging in terrace or semi-detached housing where new accesses would result in the loss of a significant proportion of the walled frontage. The construction of poor quality timber fences or walls in styles unsympathetic to the area is also highly damaging.

22.2 There is also a need to apply highway standards flexibly to avoid inappropriate standardised highway design unsuited to the local character. Changes to curbing has largely been in response to the increasing problems of litigation resulting from accidents due to defects. Often this relates to problems in their alignment and unevenness. This is essentially an issue of highway management and highlights the need for a co-ordinated approach on a range of highway issues with potential impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. This includes signage, road markings, materials, cycle lanes, traffic calming, car parking mitigation and residents parking.

## TOWNSCAPE AND SPATIAL CHARACTER

23.0 The visual and spatial characteristics of the area are vitally important to its locally distinctive character. Departures from the regular pattern of building heights,



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building lines, walled boundaries, trees and their relationship with adjoining roads can have significant effects on the streetscene. Insensitive infilling, backland development and plot amalgamation can alter the historic layout of the area, change its apparent density, townscape quality and often results in the loss of trees and planting. Such changes have the potential to damage the visual, architectural and historic integrity of the area and alter the characteristic plot shape and pattern of development.

23.1 Recent pressures for development have been from infilling and, to a lesser extent, household extensions and has sometimes resulted in conflict with the established townscape and spatial character of the area. An important area of concern in Brincliffe and Kenwood area has been the effect on the three dimensional space between buildings, dramatically altering the distinctive “villa” context of clearly detached and semi-detached buildings set within spacious grounds. It is dangerous to assume that more spacious areas can accommodate such change more readily than denser areas. Many of the environments within the Nether Edge Conservation Area were specifically design to be spacious and the setting of villas within substantial grounds is crucial to the character of the conservation area. Development which is excessive in mass, footprint or poorly related to adjacent villas damages this essential quality of the conservation area (Fig.33b&d). The considerable amount of on-street parking is another problem which adversely affect the visual quality and character of the area, especially in the Nether Edge Village area.

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