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Beeston St John's Grove Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Nottinghamshire
County Council

Planning

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas were first introduced following The Civic Amenities Act 1967 to protect the attractive historic character of towns and villages. Today the main protection of these areas comes under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 [the Act] and Planning Policy Guidance note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment [PPG 15].

Section 69 of the Act imposes a duty on the local planning authority to designate as a conservation area any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'¹. Designation introduces a control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides a basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest. Designation further enables a control over the lopping or felling of trees; advertisement control and a restriction on development rights. Local planning authorities can also withdraw certain permitted development rights, such as the replacement of windows and doors and the alteration of boundary walls, by the imposition of an Article 4(2) direction, if they feel these minor alterations would erode the special character or appearance of the area².

15 conservation areas have been designated by Broxtowe Borough Council.

1.2 The purpose of this appraisal

PPG 15 states: 'Section 71 of the Act places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. It is important that designation is not seen as an end in

itself: policies will almost always need to be developed which clearly identify what it is about the character or appearance of the area which should be preserved or enhanced, and set out the means by which that objective is to be pursued. Clear assessment and definition of an area's special interest and the action needed to protect it will help to generate awareness and encourage local property owners to take the right sort of action for themselves.'³

This appraisal will aim to assess and define the special character of St John's Grove conservation area by the methods described in the different sections below. Briefly, these will cover: an investigation of the historical development of the town; an analysis of its current appearance and character; a discussion of positive, negative and neutral factors which are having an effect on that appearance and character; and suggestions for the preservation and enhancement of the area.

The appraisal will further try to identify whether or not the existing area boundaries are still justified in the light of physical changes since their initial designation. If the character of an area has been seriously eroded by unsympathetic alterations and new developments, it might be necessary to reduce its size or even de-designate. On the other hand, early designations did not consider many 19th century elements of a settlement, particularly industrial areas and buildings, to warrant inclusion. Over the last 25 years these elements of our social and industrial heritage have become more valued, and so should be reconsidered in any appraisal process. This might lead to extensions that include such elements within an existing conservation area, or the designation of an entirely new area.

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 s.69

² Planning Policy Guidance note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment 1994 s.4

³ *ibid.*

1.3 Planning Policy Framework

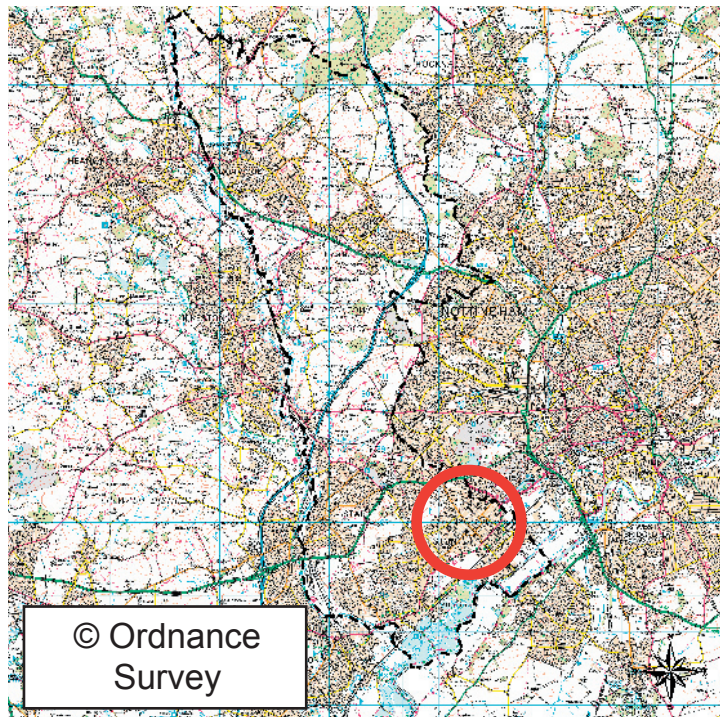
The saved local plan policies set out the current framework of conservation policy (Policy E3). The Local Plan is due to be replaced by a new Local Development Framework (LDF). This conservation area appraisal will be used to support the conservation policy that will form part of the core strategy development plan document (DPD), primary development control policies, DPD and the Beeston Town Centre supplementary Planning Document (SPD) of the new LDF. The Beeston Town Centre SPD was adopted on 17th June 2008.

2.0 St John's Grove Conservation Area

2.1 Location and Setting

St John's Grove lies to the north of the old village core of Beeston, which lies four miles south-west of the centre of Nottingham. Beeston is situated on a gravel terrace of the River Trent, with the ground sloping gently down to the river to the south, and rising gently to the north.

Location of St John's Grove



2.2 Historical Development

In order to describe successfully the character of St John's Grove, and to devise a suitable management strategy for the conservation area, it is essential to understand its historic dimension. By looking at the historic development of the area we can understand how it came to be the way it is today. From this understanding we are better informed to make the right decisions regarding change to its physical fabric in relation to the effect on its historic character.

The name 'Beeston' is a fairly common English place name of Old English origin and a notable settlement here probably originated during the Anglo Saxon period. Beeston appears as Bestune in Domesday and records of a church here go back to the 12th century. The settlement remained a small agrarian community on the Trent river terrace until the early 18th century. After this time, as with many surrounding settlements, framework knitting arrived in the village. This domestic hosiery and lace manufacture developed Beeston into a small factory town by the 19th century, with many tall mills throughout the town.

Beeston's industrial base diversified further in the late 19th century, when there were four cycle works in production, the most notable being the Humber works. Furthermore, Nottingham manufacturers and merchants began to settle in Beeston, attracted by the close proximity to the city; good rail communications; and the areas of high class housing that were being built. St John's Grove is one, particularly well executed, example of this type of housing.

St John's Grove lies in the area of one of Beeston's former open fields, which were enclosed in 1809. The land here was allotted to the vicar of the parish church of St John The Baptist, in lieu of tithes. It was purchased in 1878 by a group of local leading citizens known as the Beeston Land Society, in order to provide housing for the growing population of Beeston.

The society divided the land into 28 residential plots of about one acre. Wide streets were laid out on a rectilinear grid, and strict conditions for the development were established. Houses were limited to a specified value; they were to be set back a consistent distance from the road; and public houses were prohibited.

The older housing dates from the late 19th to early 20th century and has many fine examples of Edwardian architecture. The 25" OS map of 1914, however, shows many of the plots were still undeveloped, particularly the large corner plots and those towards the top of Devonshire Avenue.

Only three buildings appear in the area on the earliest OS map of 1885, these are: 1 Glebe Street North (Bramcote Road); 4 Glebe Street (formerly a large semi-detached dwelling, number 3 having been demolished); and 2-4 Cavendish Place. Sixteen more buildings had been erected by the time of the OS map of 1901, to include the rest of the small semi-detached dwellings on Glebe Street North; 5 houses on Devonshire Avenue; 4 at the south end of Elm Avenue; and 2 on the Chilwell Road. Twenty five further houses had been built throughout the area by the time of the 1914 map.

3.0 Character Analysis

Along with a consideration of the history and development of the area, an investigation of its character today is necessary in order to draw out those special qualities that warrant its conservation area designation. This is done by employing spatial analysis and character analysis.

These techniques can be used to describe a “sense of place” by analysing physical aspects, such as the scale of buildings and trees, and their relationship to open spaces; the materials used for buildings and border treatments; routes through the area; views and vistas into and out of the area; and the less tangible factors that help make up how the different areas are experienced, such as particular sounds, ambient noise and activity. These factors inter-relate to form an experience special to the area and give it its character.

St John’s Grove conservation area was designated in 1993 and comprises the roads: Glebe Street, Devonshire Avenue, Elm Avenue, Vicarage Street, Cavendish Place and Newcastle Avenue, and the southern part of Bramcote Road (formerly Glebe Street North). It is comprised almost totally of residential properties, the exceptions being two Beeston Town Hall annexes, with adjacent car park, and a small commercial area at its southern end.

The area can be accessed from three directions. The main entrance is from the south, off Chilwell Road, the others are off Cromwell Road to the west; and Bramcote Road to the north. Cavendish Place and Vicarage Street both form culs de sac. Devonshire Avenue and Elm Avenue form the main arteries of the area. They run roughly north/south and provide long, tree-lined vistas.



Vista along Elm Avenue



Late Victorian house in large garden

The tall mature trees that border the streets, and the large gardens with further tall trees and shrubs, are a vital element in the character of the area. They create screens surrounding many of the dwellings and a backdrop to the area as a whole. They further provide insulation from the surrounding ambient noise, and also create a sound-scape of their own on breezy days, which adds a further dimension to the character of the area.

The leafy, mature gardens to the front and sides of the majority of the properties, and the way in which they are enclosed from the public realm by walls, railings, fences and hedging are further important contributory factors to the special character of the area.

Characteristic boundary treatments: iron railings*Local stone walling and hedges*

The area contains many fine examples of large, high quality Edwardian dwellings, both detached and semi-detached. They feature a variety of architectural detailing and retain a very high proportion of their original windows, doors and roof coverings. These features play an enormous part in preserving the historic appearance of the area, and combine with the mature gardens, boundary walling and traditional railings, to give much of the area a timeless quality, particularly along Elm Avenue. Elm Avenue also contains fine examples of large, high-quality inter-war housing, with their own characteristic details, such as circular windows.

Edwardian dwelling*Inter-war house*

The historic character and quality of the conservation area is diluted in places owing to ill-considered late 20th century development, some of which has taken place to the rear of the larger houses' gardens. Almost all of this was prior to designation. Many of these dwellings incorporate materials and designs unharmonious to the general character of the area, such as yellow brick, concrete tile or pantile roof coverings; and UPVC windows and doors. For these reasons they have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The quiet, residential character of the area has been eroded at the southern end of Devonshire Avenue, where it joins Chilwell Road. The commercial buildings between Newcastle Avenue and Chilwell Road have removed their front boundary walls and gardens to provide parking places. This has created a wide expanse of asphalt surfacing which gives this part of the area an urban character.

*Loss of front boundaries*

Visual leakage through car park

The other main erosive element of the conservation area is the Town Hall car park, which sits incongruously amongst the otherwise uniform layout of Devonshire Avenue in particular, and the conservation area as a whole. The car park is another wide open space which allows visual leakage through to the backs of buildings of neighbouring areas.

3.1 Public realm

The area has largely retained the secluded, genteel and high quality of its Edwardian origin, particularly along Elm Avenue and the western end of Vicarage Street. Here the streets are quiet, with little through traffic. This contrasts with the noisier Devonshire Avenue, which is used a main route through the area and has more parked cars. These feature prominently towards its southern end, nearest Beeston town centre, and in the region of the town hall offices and car park. The streetscape comprises asphalt roads and footpaths. The roads are largely free of highway related clutter and over-zealous road markings, making them a muted element, within the area.

3.2 Treatment of footways

Some old weathered stone kerbs are still in place, but many have been replaced with concrete. The footpaths feature square stone setts which give a special character to the footways of the conservation area, making the streets distinct from those surrounding.

Along Elm Avenue the setts form a linear demarcation between footway and planting area on the wide footpaths. These planting areas terminate in semi-circular curves at road junctions. The planting areas contain the trees of the avenue and have been filled with a reddish asphalt, but were probably originally of grass. Presumably this style of footpath treatment also featured along Devonshire Avenue but has since been lost through maintenance work.

The setts also act as circular edging around the trees along the inter-linking routes of Glebe Street, Vicarage Street and Newcastle Avenue. They have suffered piecemeal loss over time through the backfilling of highway works, there are areas where they are missing, and they have been replaced with rectangular concrete setts in Cavendish Place. At the time of this survey, new gas mains were being installed and areas of setts were being replaced with asphalt. The borough council planning section was informed of this and action taken to halt the process, although those areas with missing setts still remain.

These setts are an attractive feature which should be retained, but many are loose, and in some places have been raised up by the tree roots to cause a potential trip hazard: in fact the trees are now growing too large to be contained within these features .

*Erosion: loss of stone setts*



Surviving stone kerbs

There are a variety of streetlamp styles, which vary from attractive historic and ornate cast iron examples, to tall concrete utilitarian designs, unsympathetic to the character of the area. Some of the older streetlamps appear to be either redundant or poorly maintained. They are rusting and detract from the otherwise well maintained public spaces. Aluminium posts for telephone wires similarly erode the character of the area.

There are some examples where cooperative working in the public realm would improve its appearance by reducing the unnecessary erection of signposts on footpaths. Corporate bus stop posts have been erected beside existing lamp posts, where a simple sign affixed to the lamp post would have sufficed.

Historic, well maintained streetlamp



Rusty streetlamp, with bus-stop adjacent



3.3 Border Treatments

Although there are a variety of traditional treatments to the front borders of the properties, that include both brick and stone walls, railings, fences, and hedging; these would originally have created a variety but also a rhythm through repetitive use. Some more recent border treatments, however, are tending to erode this rhythmic nature through the introduction of too much variety in style and material. For example, the use of stained timber fencing of poor quality or design; rendered block walling; or simply the removal of hedging borders.



Eroded front boundary



Post & rail fencing in UPVC

There are some areas, particularly along Elm Avenue, where the border hedging plants are receiving insufficient maintenance. Some of the hedges have gaps within them, and others have become very overgrown, forming stands of mature trees rather than hedges, and are blocking the footpath. There has also been an introduction of many different hedge varieties, which also degrade the historic character of the area.

3.4 Replacement windows

There is a low incidence of UPVC replacement windows at present, these being mainly confined to the more recent dwellings. However, half of the smaller, late Victorian semi-detached properties on Bramcote Road have lost their sliding sash windows to these replacements products, which has lowered the quality of this entrance to the conservation area.

Unfortunately, two high-profile historic properties along Devonshire Avenue feature UPVC windows; 26, on a corner plot with Glebe Street, and 13, a large and recently extended villa. Both of these are high-quality buildings which would be better served with quality painted timber windows. Number 26 has had its stone mullions removed in order to fit its replacement windows.

Some examples of stained timber doors and windows are also evident, such as at 23 Devonshire Avenue and the rear of 10 Glebe Street. These also erode the appearance of the area and their use should be discouraged.

There are some UPVC garage doors, fencing and gates, which are tending to lower the quality of the conservation area, particularly at 2 Vicarage Street, and 3 Cavendish Place.

The unity of the area's character and appearance is further being eroded through the use of a wide variety of paving materials for driveways.

3.5 Commercial Area

The southern edge of the conservation area fronts Chilwell Road/High Road where a handful of commercial premises operate. These comprise offices, a doctors surgery, a childrens' nursery, solicitors offices, and a Red Cross establishment. All of these premises are housed in former residential properties and so maintain the general appearance of the area. Some alterations and extensions to the historic buildings have harmed their character somewhat, but much of this could be easily reversed. The signage related to the businesses is of the shiny plastic variety and would benefit from a considered design approach, more fitting for a conservation area.

3.6 Gap sites

Opportunities may arise, such as gaps like the Town Hall carpark, or resulting from demolition. If these were to be developed for housing it would be an opportunity to reinstate the uniform plot boundaries and layouts as originally conceived.

The large gardens of many of the properties might be considered to be additional gap sites for development. Owing to these gardens being such a crucial element in the character of the conservation area, such developments should be discouraged.

4.0 The impact of individual buildings and boundary treatments on the character

Map 1 illustrates the impact made by individual buildings and their boundary treatments on the character of the conservation area. The buildings are shown as having either a positive, a negative or a neutral effect on the area's character, and have been compiled using the English Heritage guidance reproduced in Appendix 1. The boundary treatments are similarly illustrated as making either a positive, negative, or neutral contribution.

- Buildings described as positive, either positively enhance or support the character of the area, or are significant to its historic development. They may, however, be degraded because of minor, easily reversible, alterations.
- Buildings described as negative, erode or detract from the character of the area. They are either historic buildings whose appearance has been seriously damaged by unsympathetic alterations, or modern buildings which exhibit few of the characteristic elements that make the area special. They cannot be easily enhanced.
- Buildings described as neutral do not enhance the character of the area. It might be possible to improve their contribution to the character of the area by undertaking minor changes.
- Positive boundaries are those which follow the historic boundary lines of a property or area and retain the traditional methods of construction, such as: stone walling; native hedgerows; painted cast metal railings.
- Negative boundaries are those which have been lost altogether; have had their traditional construction replaced by unsympathetic alternatives; or are new boundaries of unsympathetic design which have eroded the historic layout of the area.
- Neutral boundaries do not greatly erode the character, but could be improved easily to make a positive contribution.

5.0 The key characteristics of the conservation area and current issues affecting them

Traditional architectural materials and features:

- Sandstone boundary walling
- Red brick boundary walling with blue brick details
- Wrought iron railings
- Stone setts along footpaths and around footpath trees
- Stone kerbs
- Orangey-red machine made brick
- Decorative terracotta ridge tiles and finials
- Large carved limestone date-stones
- Limestone window and door surrounds, some decoratively carved
- Roof coverings of red plain tile or natural Welsh slate
- Cast iron rainwater goods
- Terracotta chimney pots, many with crown tops
- Tile hung walls
- Circular windows
- Recessed, semi-circular arched doorways
- Dentilated and ornate moulded brick eave details
- Ornate moulded brick string courses
- Painted timber sash windows

Summary of special interest (strengths)

- Peaceful tree-lined streets with little clutter and limited traffic intrusion
- Heavy mature tree and hedge cover creates a localised sound-scape and a visual and aural buffer between dwellings and from surrounding areas
- Large late 19th to early 20th century dwellings with a variety of architectural detailing characterise the high quality appearance of the area
- Mature leafy gardens and well defined, enclosed boundaries separate the dwellings from the public realm
- High quality boundary walls, railings and clipped hedges contribute greatly to the pleasant experience of the public realm
- Stone sett details on footpaths provide a distinctive character to the public realm, differentiating it from the surrounding streets

Summary of erosive factors (weaknesses)

- Loss of front boundaries and inappropriate boundary treatments harm the area's unity
- Infill development in large gardens has eroded historic regularity of plot sizes
- Newer developments incorporate designs and materials unsympathetic to the historic character and layout of the area

- Loss of stone setts on footpaths, and the introduction of generic edging material is harming the distinctive quality and appearance of the public realm
- The Town Hall car park has opened up the enclosed nature of the area, allowing intrusive views out to the rear elevations of large neighbouring buildings
- Unsympathetically designed or poorly maintained street lighting detracts from the high quality architecture
- Inappropriate and widely varying driveway materials break up the unity of the buildings
- UPVC garage doors, gates and fencing lower the quality of the area
- The commercial properties at the Devonshire Avenue/Chilwell Road interface lower the quality of the area through their: front boundary treatments; unsympathetic alterations; and choice of signage

Threats to the character of the conservation area

- Potential for intrusive highway works to cope with increasing through traffic
- Potential loss of character through development of gardens and replacement of traditional boundary treatments
- Unsympathetic redevelopment of the Town Hall car park
- Piecemeal loss of the traditional architectural materials and features listed above

- Further erosion of Chilwell Road entrance from unsympathetic development and appearance of the commercial properties

Opportunities for enhancement

- Reinstatement of traditional front boundary treatments to repair rhythm of street frontages
- Simple regular property maintenance, such as the annual clearance and repair of rainwater guttering and a 5 yearly repainting of the timber windows, doors etc.
- Provision of guidance publications on designs and materials suitable for the conservation area
- Reinstatement of lost characteristic architectural features such as: timber sliding-sash windows; stone window mullions; slate or plain tile roofs; finials and ornate ridge tiles
- Reinstatement of stone setts and stone kerbs to footpaths
- Repair and maintenance of the historic street lighting
- Replacement of the utility street lamps with historic items to match those existing
- Stricter control of advertisements, signage designs, and development of commercial properties at the Chilwell Road entrance
- Tree planting to screen open character of Town Hall car park

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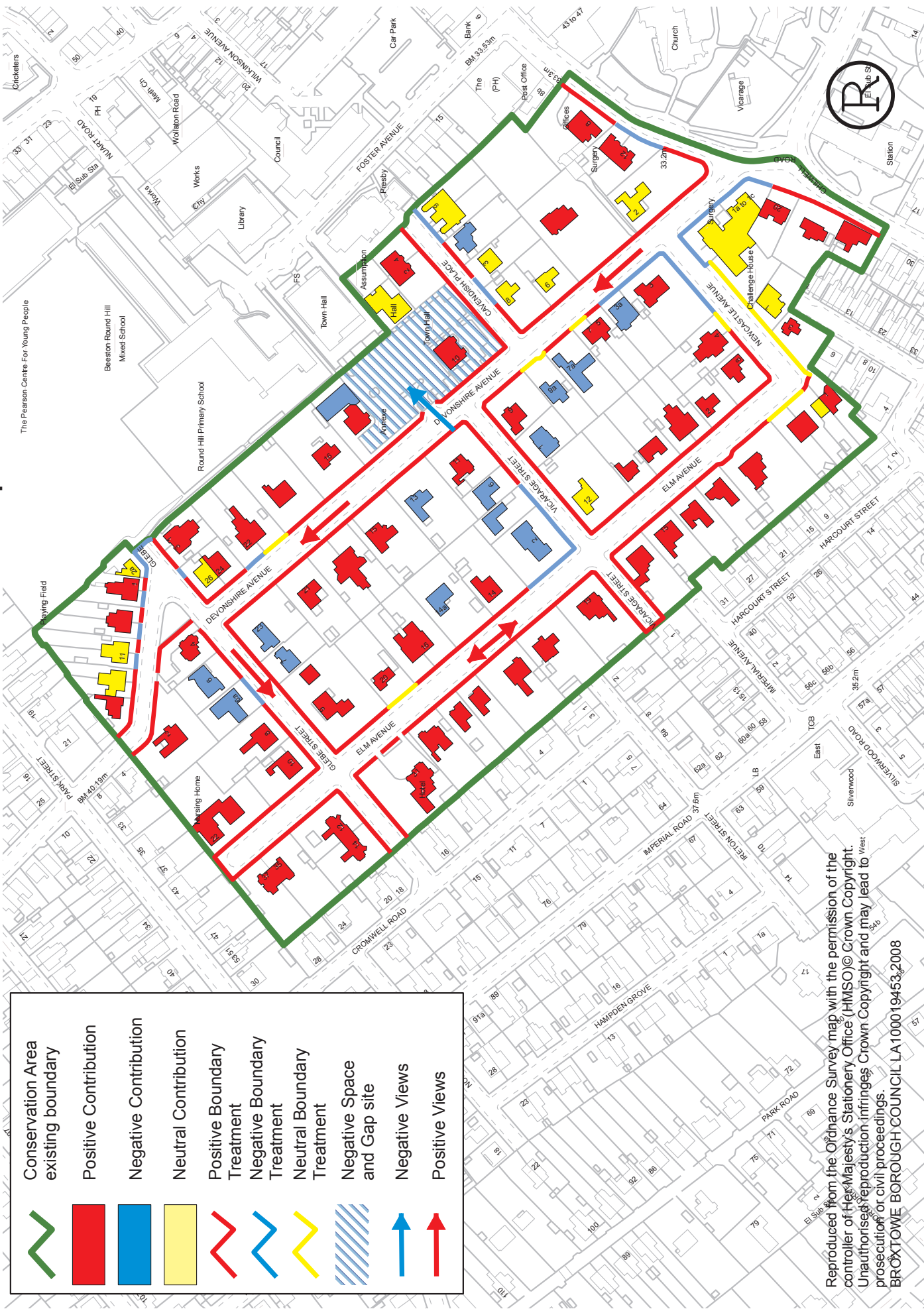
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www.picturethepast.org.uk – Historic pictures of Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire

Map

Map 1: St John's Grove Conservation Area



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7.0 Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Criteria for assessing the contribution made by unlisted buildings in a conservation area⁴

1. Is the building the work of a particular architect of regional or local note?
2. Has it qualities of age, style, materials or any other characteristics which reflect those of at least a substantial number of the buildings in the conservation area?
3. Does it relate by age, materials or in any other historically significant way to adjacent listed buildings, and contribute positively to their setting?
4. Does it individually, or as part of a group, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in which it stands, or of an earlier phase of growth?
5. Does it have significant historic association with established features such as the road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?
6. Does the building have landmark quality, or contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces, including exteriors or open spaces with a complex of public buildings?
7. Does it reflect the traditional functional character of, or former uses within, the area?
8. Has it significant historic associations with local people or past events?
9. Does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area?
10. If a structure associated with a designed landscape within the conservation area, such as a significant wall, terracing or a minor garden building, is it of identifiable importance to the historic design?

Any one of these characteristics could provide the basis for considering that a building makes a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area, provided that its historic form and values have not been seriously eroded by unsympathetic alteration.



This report has been produced by Broxtowe Borough Council Planning Department and Nottinghamshire County Council Building Conservation Team

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