

WEST PARK CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

1 Policy context

1.1 During the preparation of the Far Headingley, Weetwood and West Park Neighbourhood Design Statement, adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2005, a character analysis of West Park, amongst other areas, was carried out. It became clear that this part of West Park was a unique example of an Edwardian suburb which has changed little since it was built.

1.2 A number of recent planning applications indicate that there is mounting pressure for these large houses to be altered or even demolished in a manner which could affect their character, and there are salutary examples of the discordant effects of such change from previous decades within the area.

1.3 There are a number of factors, set out in this appraisal, which indicate that West Park is an area of special architectural and historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. As such, Leeds City Council as the local authority feels that it merits the protection that designation as a Conservation Area can provide.

2 Historical summary of the area

2.1 The core of the area now known as West Park was originally developed on farmland (Low Ox Moor) purchased from the Earl of Cardigan's estate at the end of the 19th Century and located immediately to the north of the estate of Lord Grimthorpe (Sir Edmund Beckett) which at that time remained undeveloped.

- 2.2 Much of Cardigan's estate in Headingley had already been developed during the latter half of the 19th Century and as Leeds expanded along the Otley Road it initially 'by-passed' Beckett's estate: hence the apparent isolation of the West Park development in the early 1900s.
- 2.3 West Park was progressively built during the Edwardian era up to the First World War, and reflected the changing style of design from 'Victorian' red brick and stone mullioned windows as seen in Darnley Road to half and fully rendered houses with large wooden framed bay windows in typical 'Arts and Crafts' style elsewhere.
- 2.4 The 1909 O. S. map of the area (surveyed in 1906) shows the new grid road layout and a scattering of large detached and semi-detached houses in relatively small plots throughout the development site.
- 2.5 To serve this growing population, the tram route (no 1) from Leeds was extended from Far Headingley to West Park in 1908 before being finally extended to Lawnswood in 1913.
- 2.6 A parade of shops, including the West Park Post Office, with flats over them, was constructed on Otley Road in 1913 with distinctive Dutch gables facing the forecourt, albeit initially with one of the units missing.
- 2.7 No 2 Darnley Road was the home of J. R. Tolkien (of Hobbit and Lord of the Rings fame) between 1924 and 1926 when he became professor of English Language at Leeds University.

3 The character and appearance of the area

- 3.1 The character of the Conservation Area has been forged from the twin forces of geography and history. The pattern of development on the ground has combined with the architectural style of its Edwardian period to create an individual and distinctive character which is worthy of conservation.

3.2 The Conservation Area is grand piano-shaped in plan but was nevertheless laid out with a rectangular grid of roads on land which almost imperceptibly slopes up from south to north. Spen Road follows the double curve of the northern boundary alongside the playing fields of Lawnswood School. With its wide verge and tree-lined northern edge this has a very different character to the area's other straight roads. West Park Drive is the centrepiece of the grid, wider than the other roads and running east-west linking Spen Road with Spen Lane to the west. Unlike most of the roads, it has no grass verges, few houses face it directly and many of the boundaries are lined with tall hedges.

3.3 Although the Conservation Area is well contained by its southern and northern boundaries and with a narrow neck to the east, its western edge is defined by the different period and style of the houses built beyond it. The east-west roads continue, but were constructed later than the stretches within the area.

3.4 The method of the area's original development – laying out a structured road system with more or less regular blocks and dividing into individual plots – has created the framework for the character of the area. There is a fairly uniform building line along each road. Whether they are detached or semi-detached, the houses are large, with wide frontages and deep plans on relatively small plots. They are almost universally three storeys with the upper storey contained within double-pitched roof spaces. There is a consistent use of materials: red brick, white painted render, mock-Tudor gables, red pantiles or rosemary tiles on pitched roofs. But within that framework there is a wealth of variety and individual detail. Tall chimney stacks, roof combinations, dormers set well below the ridge line, windows, doors, porches, bays and oriels: all these vary from house to house and most provide an expression of the art and craft which went into their construction.

3.5 At the western end and partly along the southern end – Darnley Road and Arncliffe Road - the houses are mainly of brick. More Victorian than Edwardian in style, their design is fairly restrained: windows and doors have a vertical emphasis, stone heads and sills are plain, and roof forms are simple. Some of these houses, though, have more expressive half-timbered gables giving a flavour of what is to come as one moves through the area and the later years of development. No 3 Darnley Road also features a turret on the corner with Spen Road which acts a focus for the entrance into the area from Otley Road

3.6 From Chalfont Road westward, the houses become more relaxed and playful in their architecture, drawing inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement with touches of Art Nouveau. Main roofs are double pitched, some with full gables and some half-hipped. The plan form of the houses, with single or double storey projections, give rise to a multiplicity of additional subsidiary roofs, mostly double pitched, but many of the bays and porches have flat roofs with slightly oversailing eaves. This variety, together with the universal use of chimneys, provides the area with its characteristically intricate roofscape, contrasting with the regularity of the street arrangement.

3.7 Most walls have rendered first floor elevations, with brick confined to the lower levels. Windows are wide, often with large two storey bays lighting the major rooms. Front porches, many of them enclosed, are a particular feature of the area, and it is here at the front entrance that the joinery details are at their most exuberant and expressive. Windows are also a source of individual expression. In addition to normal windows, there are bays, square or with chamfered sides: oriels paired either side of external chimney breasts, or set individually on side elevations: circular windows with rubbed brick or stone surrounds. Many windows still retain the original white painted timber frames and stained glass upper lights. Stained glass also features in many front doors and stair windows.

3.8 At the eastern end, the Conservation Area extends into Otley Road to include a three storey row of Dutch gable fronted shops with flats above. These form an important feature in Otley Road and help to define the distinct neighbourhood of West Park, of which the Conservation Area is a part. The quality of the intact upper elevations is no longer matched by the ground floor shop fronts and the paved area at the front, now dominated by uncoordinated shop fronts and indiscriminate parking respectively.

3.9 Not every plot was developed in the Edwardian era. There have been later houses and flats constructed, mostly over the past fifty years and most having ignored the essential characteristics of their neighbours, being smaller in scale, with more basic detailing, and in some cases, flat roofs. Large tarmac parking areas and flat roofed rows of garages add to the poor appearance of these developments. More recent examples, though, have made some attempt to reflect the scale and roof forms of the original houses. However, even there, the use of factory produced joinery components has failed to match the varied window arrangements and individual detailing of their Edwardian counterparts.

3.10 In spite of the small gardens, relative to the large houses, the area still gives an impression of a substantial amount of greenery. The landscape, both hard and soft, adds a great deal to the character of the Conservation Area. Many gardens, mostly those to the south and east, are bounded by low brick walls capped with stone copings and with taller gate piers. Most of the remainder have hedgerow boundaries, taller on side gardens where they abut the road. Some individual trees make a particularly important contribution to views where they occupy corner positions. Elsewhere trees within gardens provide a soft and contrasting backdrop to the buildings. Important green edges/views

of West Park are to be seen from the playing fields to the south and the Lawnswood School grounds to the north.

3.1 Apart from West Park Drive, all the roads in the area have grass verges. These are narrow, between the road and the pavement, but do provide a respite from otherwise wall to wall tarmac. Most roads retain the original stone kerbs, an essential ingredient in the character of the streetscape. Some roads still retain the stone sett channels, though most have been covered with tarmac

4. Opportunities for enhancement

4.1 West Park Drive would benefit from tree planting and widening of the pavements and/or adding of grass verges to complement traffic calming/carrageway narrowing.

4.2 The junction of West Park Drive and Spen Road, in particular, needs addressing where egress from Greenhead Road can be dangerous.

4.3 The forecourt of the parade of shops needs quality street furniture and paving throughout.

4.4 The shop units themselves need coherent shop facia design principles in keeping with the quality of the buildings.

4.5 Some flat blocks and associated flat roofed garage courts need screening and/or enhancement to be more in character with the area.

5. Public consultation

5.1 The proposal to extend the Conservation Area was first made as part of the production of the Far Headingley, Weetwood and West Park Neighbourhood Design Statement. This was a local community produced document which has now become Supplementary Design Guidance (28th February 2005).

5.2 The proposal for a West Park Conservation Area was put to the public as a whole at a public exhibition of the Design Statement in April 2004.

5.3 A detailed 'walkabout' survey by was carried out by local residents on 18th March 2006.

5.4 The findings of the survey were reported to the AGM of the West Park Residents Association on 5th April 2006 where the survey plan was displayed for information and comment.

6. Buildings of Local Interest

- 247 – 263 (odds) Otley Road
- 1 – 4 (incl) Darnley Road
- 5, 11 – 17 (odds), 21, 23 Arncliffe Road
- 2, 4, 8, 16 Arncliffe Road
- Brantwood, Arncliffe Road
- 3, 7, 9, 11, 17, 19 – 25 Spen Road
- 1 West Park Drive,
- 1 – 5 (odds), 2 – 8 (evens) Edgerton Road
- 1,2,3 Greenhead Road
- 1 – 9 (odds), 2 – 6 (evens), 14 – 24 (evens) Thornfield Road,
- 1 – 15 (odds), 10, 12 Ashleigh Road
- 5 – 9 (odds), 15, 17, 21, 23, 29 North Parade,
- 4 – 10 (evens), 14 – 32, (evens) North Parade