

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Orford Road Conservation Area

INTRODUCTION

This document is an “Appraisal” document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides “a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This Appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Orford Road Conservation Area, which was designated by the Council in 1990. This includes the more obvious aspects such as buildings, spaces, and architectural development, as well as an attempt to portray the often less tangible qualities which make the area “special”.

PLANNING CONTEXT

(i) **National Policies** – Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950’s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than individual buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that Listed buildings are assessed against national criteria, with Lists being drawn up by English Heritage. Conservation Areas by contrast, are designated by Local Authorities on more local criteria, and are therefore very varied in character. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general. By 2005 there were eleven designated Conservation Areas in Waltham Forest.

(ii) **Local policies** – Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that “special architectural or historic interest” which warranted designation in the first place. Policy BHE13 in the “Built and historic environment” chapter of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 is the relevant council policy concerning the designation and subsequent control of Conservation Areas within the borough. In addition Policy 4B.13 of the Consolidated London Plan (2008) produced by the Greater London Authority emphasises the need for boroughs to work with local communities to recognise and manage local distinctiveness, ensuring proposed

developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST

(i) Location and population:

The Orford Road Conservation Area lies to the immediate south of the historic Walthamstow Village centre, which is situated around the old parish church and churchyard of St Mary's. The area is located on the higher ground to the east of the Lea Valley, roughly equidistant between the reservoirs and former marshes of the Lea valley to the west and Epping Forest to the east. Until 1965 the whole area was part of southwest Essex, but today it is within the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

The Liverpool Street to Chingford railway line largely forms the northern boundary of the Conservation Area, with the main roads Hoe Street, Shernhall Street and Lea Bridge Road within several hundred yards to the west, east and south.

The population of modern day Walthamstow is approximately 85,680 of which some 1500 approx live within the designated Conservation Area.

(ii) Origins and development of settlement:

Domesday Book records that in 1086 Walthamstow comprised four separate village settlements in forest clearings connected by tracks. The establishment of a church at the subsequently named Church End settlement raised the status of this settlement, and as the "centre" of Walthamstow it prospered and grew. The "Village" area remained the centre of Walthamstow until the mid 19th century, when the combination of the expansion of London, the enclosure of the Commons, and the arrival of the steam railways rapidly transformed the area from a rural Essex parish to effectively a Victorian suburb of London.

The Grosvenor House estate to the west, with its avenue of large Elm trees leading from the house to the Church Common was the first to be broken up for development. The trees were felled and plots offered for sale from 1851, the subsequent development forming Grosvenor Park Road.

The Church Common, which extended immediately to the south of the old village centre, was enclosed in 1850 and split up for building development in 1853. By 1860 this development was well underway, transforming the character and appearance of the area forever. The 1853-55 roads on the former Common include Beulah Rd & Eden Rd, (their names a fanciful Biblical allusion to the Promised Land and paradise) with their "model cottages", Grosvenor Rise East, Pembroke Road, Stanhope Road and a short stretch of Grosvenor Park Road east of Pembroke Road.

The arrival of the railway in 1869/70 contributed to the suburbanisation of the area, and the railway cutting itself created a physical barrier between the

historic village centre to the north and the “modern” Victorian expansion to the south.

The administrative centre of Walthamstow until this time was the Vestry House & former Workhouse near the Churchyard (now Vestry House Museum), but in 1876 a new Town Hall was erected in Orford Road which established the status of the Orford Road area as the new “centre of town”. By 1877 Orford Rd/Beulah Rd was also established as the high-class shopping centre of Walthamstow with 35 shops, and whilst it was soon to lose its commercial centre status to the expanding High St/Hoe St area, it nevertheless remained the centre of Walthamstow until 1940/41 when the new Town Hall was opened in Forest Road.

(iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types:

Until 1850 the bulk of the area was open common land, with the exception of the landscaped grounds of Orford House and Grosvenor House. The oldest property within the area today and the only one to predate 1850 is Orford House, a stuccoed Regency villa circa 1802 which stood on the western edge of the common land, and gives its name to the road. In the 1830’s it was the home of Miss Elizabeth Cass, a local benefactress, and is fairly typical of the larger residences erected in Walthamstow by city merchants & businessmen up until the mid 19th century, attracted by the scenic qualities of the area and the easy access to the City afforded by the location. The property remained in residential use until 1921 when it became Orford House Social Club, in which use it remains today.

The common land itself was used by local residents over the centuries, alternately for grazing and for growing essential crops. The eastern boundary of the former common is still clearly defined today by the line of Beulah Path, and the parallel layout of Beulah Road was clearly determined by the retention of this ancient right of way. The other boundaries by contrast are quite blurred amongst the building development which now covers the area, although Orford House and its surviving curtilage continues to be a visual marker for the central western edge of the common. Neither this former use however, nor any historic patronage had any great influence on either the layout of roads or the building types which subsequently covered the common land. With few exceptions development occurred in a largely ad hoc fashion and the eclectic mix of Victorian villas, cottages, semi-detached and terraced houses is one of the characteristic features of the area today.

(iv) The archaeological significance and potential of the area including identification of any scheduled ancient buildings:

The Conservation Area contains no scheduled ancient monuments, but as a known pre-conquest centre of Saxon settlement the older village centre to the immediate north is within an archaeological priority zone as identified within the Council’s Unitary Development Plan. The identified area of the APZ also

includes the northernmost part of the Orford Road Conservation Area, which includes Vestry Road and properties on the north side of Orford Road. Development within the APZ is subject to UDP Policy BHE17:

The Council will ensure the preservation, protection and where possible the enhancement of the archaeological heritage of the borough.

The Council will seek to encourage the conservation, protection and enhancement of the archaeological heritage of the borough, and when any development involving a site of 0.16 hectares or more is proposed within an APZ or for any site identified by a recognised archaeological authority, the archaeological significance of the site will be considered. The Council may require a preliminary archaeological site evaluation before development proposals are considered.

(v) The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area:

As mentioned above, with the exception of Orford House the Conservation Area contains an eclectic mix of predominantly Victorian cottages, villas, semi-detached and terraced houses, shops, and civic buildings. The key buildings within the Conservation Area are undoubtedly the Grade II Listed Old Town Hall and Orford House, both of which are situated in Orford Road, and the various locally listed buildings within the area, which include the former National School in Orford Rd (now the Asian centre), the associated teachers houses at 3, 5 & 7 Vestry Rd, the adjacent former Post Office sorting office, the Castle and former Windmill public houses, and the various original examples of houses, villas and cottages identified within the UDP.

(a) **The Old Town Hall** – Erected on the frontage of a slightly earlier but unsuccessful public hall of entertainment, the Town Hall building in Orford Rd was erected in 1876 by Walthamstow Local Board, and took over from the nearby Vestry House as the seat of late 19th century local government for the area. It remained the administrative centre of Walthamstow until 1940/41, when it was replaced by the new Town Hall in Forest Road to the north. Built of yellow London stock brickwork with stucco dressings, and designed in an eclectic mix of Italianate & French second empire styles, the building remains largely original externally, and internally the main tiled foyer, decorative iron staircase and former first floor Board Room all still survive largely as built. With its porticoed entrance and tall xxxx roof the building still retains an imposing presence in Orford Road as befits its long term status, and it is one of the most important buildings in the area.

After it was replaced as Walthamstow Town Hall the building served for many years as the main entrance and offices of the Connaught Hospital, the local cottage hospital founded at Holmcroft in Orford Road in 18xx, which gradually expanded over the years to utilise many of the other surviving 19th c buildings. More recently the building has been used as a Children's Nursery and is soon

to become a Buddhist temple & Therapy centre. In recognition of its special architectural or historic interest the Old Town Hall was Grade II Listed in 1985.

(b) A few yards to the west of the Old Town Hall stands The Asian Centre, originally erected in 1866 as part of the local **St Mary's National School**. Designed in a rogue Gothic style by William Wiggington FRIBA the "new" National school building originally accommodated young boys who had previously shared increasingly crowded accommodation with the girls at the original 1819 National School building in Vestry Road (now the National Spiritualist Church). In 1890 the two buildings provided places for 1062 local children, although average attendance was 633. The boys returned to the Vestry Road building in 1904 and the girls occupied the Orford Road building until the school closed in 1949. From then until 1977 the latter building accommodated the Pathology department of Connaught Hospital, and it is now used as the Asian Centre, a local community centre. Architecturally the building is fairly typical of National schools of the period in layout, with a large central hall lit by a huge circular window under a steeply pitched slate roof, with entrances and classrooms provided on either side in flanking wings. The building is constructed of yellow London stock brickwork with stone dressings, and decorative red & blue brick banding and diaper work.

The building has regrettably lost its cast iron cresting from the entrance-wing roofs, and there has been alteration to the main windows on the street frontage, but otherwise it is still largely original in appearance. As with the Old Town Hall it is an imposing building in its context and something of a visual surprise in what today is a relative backwater of Walthamstow. In recognition of its architectural and historic interest the building was locally listed by the council in 1988.

(c) At the rear of the school are three modest residential properties also designed by W Wiggington in 1866; **1, 3 & 5 Vestry Road**. These originally provided accommodation for teachers at the National School, and the more elaborate & decorative of the three was the Headmaster's house. This latter building echoes the architectural style of the school, with steeply pitched roofs with decorative clay tiles, yellow stock brickwork, stone dressings, decorative diaper work, and timber casement windows. The other two cottages are much plainer, in simple yellow stocks & slate, but as a group the three have considerable local architectural and historic interest, and are atypical of other contemporary residential developments in the area.

(d) **Orford House** – The oldest building in the Conservation Area and the only one to predate the post 1850 Victorian developments, Orford House is a two storey stuccoed Regency villa with shallow-pitched slate roof erected circa 1802. When originally built it was set in spacious grounds immediately adjoining the western edge of the Church Common. An ornamental pond and an avenue of trees lay to the north of Orford Road but still within the grounds of the house, the road extending only as far as the Common at this time. The house remained in residential use until 1921, and probably its most noteworthy occupants were John Cass a prosperous City merchant and his

surviving daughters, of whom Elizabeth Cass is remembered as a great local benefactress.

The pond was however drained and the trees felled during the 1860's as the land to the north was developed for housing, and further later developments have eaten into the original site. Orford House nevertheless retains a substantial plot including a bowling green at the rear, which ensures it an attractive and spacious setting particularly viewed from the south.

Externally, with the exception of a sympathetically designed two-storey extension to the east, the building has been little altered over the years. Numerous small scale changes; cables, services, additional openings etc and the lack of resources of the Social Club which occupies it to maintain it adequately however means that it is not in the condition that it could and should be, and the poor condition of the front boundary wall adds to its rather run down appearance.

The building is nevertheless the oldest and one of the most important in the Conservation Area, and with adequate investment this situation could easily be reversed to the wider benefit of the Club and the area as a whole. In recognition of its special architectural or historic interest the building was Grade II Listed in 1980.

(e) Just along Vestry Road from the former Headmaster's house of the National school stands the Sakina Trust building, originally erected in 1903 as **Walthamstow Post Office sorting depot**. The building has a highly elaborate, richly decorated red brick and terracotta façade to Vestry Road, complete with Royal coat of arms, which is of considerable architectural and historic interest and a unique feature in the area. The windows are timber box sashes in the neo Georgian style, and some sturdy well-detailed cast iron railings, again in neo-Georgian style, complete the front elevation. The main roof to the building is a shallow "M" section largely covered by Welsh slates, although cheap and inappropriate "repairs" with roofing felt have begun to undermine its original integrity.

Apart from the decorative façade the building is essentially functional as befits its original purpose. Internally it consists of two large unobstructed mail-sorting areas, originally accessible to mail vans, and a simple two storey offices at the western end. In recognition of its architectural and historic interest the building is included on the Council's local list.

(f) **The Castle, former Windmill, and the Queens Arms public houses** – By 1861 there were 15 licensed victuallers and 14 "beerhouses" in Walthamstow, three of which; The Castle, The Windmill and The Queens Arms, were established post 1850 within what is now the Orford Road Conservation Area. All three are situated on prominent corner sites, and the first two ; the Castle & the Windmill, are situated within a few hundred yards of each other.

Architecturally the latter two differ from the “traditional” Victorian corner pub in that they are detached two storey buildings built in the style of the large Victorian villas also erected in the area at the time. The former Windmill, now in residential use, is the more elaborate of the two featuring a shallow-pitched slate roof, deep eaves with elaborate decorative brackets, and fenestration in a domestic style, with timber sashes on both ground and first floor rather than large plate glass windows which was more commonplace. The Windmill is also different in that it was and remains set back from the footpath behind metal railings and hedging, which reinforces the illusion of a substantial domestic house set within a landscaped garden.

The Castle has a smaller plot with merely a front forecourt so the illusion is less convincing, but it nevertheless has an essentially large domestic scale and quality that ensures that it blends in with the assorted late 19th century houses and cottages that largely surround it. Both buildings are included on the Council’s local list.

The Queens Arms is a more traditional purpose-built Victorian corner pub, erected at the end of a row of shops, and originally sported a huge gas lantern over the corner entrance. Along with the old bakery opposite the recently refurbished building forms an attractive “gateway” to the Orford Road shopping street when approached from the west.

(g) **Comely Bank** – Whilst the Church common was enclosed in 1850 and grazing rights abolished, there was neither the funding nor the tenants immediately for wholesale development. Between 1853 – 6 several large villas were however erected on the edges of the Common, the most substantial of which was Comely Bank to the east of Beulah Path. A substantial but architecturally fairly typical four square Victorian villa, Comely Bank features yellow stock & Suffolk White bricks, shallow pitched Welsh slate roofs, deep eaves, and an imposing porticoed entrance. Originally set within extensive landscaped grounds which stretched down to Shernhall Street, Comely Bank was later the home of William Elliott Whittingham a wealthy businessman and local worthy who was a member of the local Vestry, the later local Board, the first Walthamstow School Board and later it’s Chairman.

The house was doubled in size before 1900 and along with many other large buildings in the immediate vicinity it became part of the expanding Connaught Hospital in the 20th century, being known as Comely Bank Clinic. Internally much altered but externally restored, the old house remains in Healthcare use today as part of the modern Comely Bank clinic complex which occupies the surviving fragment of the original Comely Bank site.

(vi) The contribution made by key unlisted buildings:

The area developed rapidly after 1850 but in an essentially ad hoc way, as once the roads had been laid out plots were sold off piecemeal with the end result that there is a diverse mix of residential building in the area including grand villas, modest cottages, and a diversity of Victorian houses in terraces

or semi-detached. Whilst yellow London stock brickwork, Welsh slate roofs and timber sash windows are the essential unifying features of the area, the variety in building styles, scale, detail and layout give it a special character and appearance different from the later phases of Victorian suburbanisation, where more standardised house types resulted in more uniformity of appearance.

Of particular interest are the semi-detached cottages of **Eden Grove** built by Ebenezer Clarke in 1862. Clarke was a non-conformist developer who believed in improving housing conditions for locals and migrating Londoners. With his fellow Director in the Land, Building, Investment & Cottage Improvement Society, Benjamin Rowbottom, he bought ten plots on Eden Road in 1862 onto which he erected eighteen semi-detached cottages “for the labouring poor” which became Eden Grove. Whilst somewhat cramped, these charming brick cottages with timber casement windows and slate roofs survive today as an early local example of social engineering and philanthropy. Clarke, who lived nearby in Grosvenor Park Road, produced his own history & directory of Walthamstow in 1861 and became the first Chairman of the Local Board in 1873.

A short way north along Eden Road is a short terrace of cottages named **St Mary Place, now 5-11 Eden Road**. These modest cottages were erected on plots laid out on the former Common by the National Land Society, and costing between £12 and £19! No 7 is a perfectly restored example of these modest brick cottages, with “Georgian” style sash windows, flush-beaded timber front door and Welsh slate roof. The design is largely devoid of external decoration save a brick dentil course at the eaves, and is basically a standard cottage style from the early years of the 19th century.

A few yards away at the Eden Road/Orford Road junction is the former **Ison’s Hardware & Ironmongery shop** erected in 1902 by Frank Ison. This is a traditional corner shop building which originally had a stable at the rear, and is still in largely original condition with a particularly fine shopfront and glazed & gilded fascia sign. It remained in the Ison family until recently, and is now back in use having been sympathetically restored and extended, a surviving turn of the century commercial building, still largely original in appearance. In addition to Ison’s shop only a handful of the remaining shops in the Conservation Area retain their original shopfronts. Of particular note are Nos **57, 59, 69 & 71 Orford Road** which remain exemplars for others to replicate. The reintroduction of traditional shop awnings to a number of businesses in the road, and the increased use of the shop frontages, probably inspired by the attractive and original example set by La Ruga restaurant, has added considerably to the character and attractiveness of this historic shopping parade.

In contrast to the modest cottages of Eden Road substantial villas were also erected on the former Common land and at the western end of Grosvenor Park Road in the 1850’s, hoping presumably to capitalise on Walthamstow’s reputation as a pretty retiring place for wealthy merchants and businessmen. Only a few large villas were however erected before smaller higher density

development prevailed, and of these only a handful survive today. The largest are **Lyndhurst** at the Orford Road/Beulah Path junction and 123 Grove Road, and three slightly smaller examples also survive at **73, and 76/78 Grosvenor Park Road**. The Victorian detached and semi-detached villa of the period aspired to the grandeur and elegance of country life but was essentially urban in character. Of the examples noted, Lyndhurst, 123 Grove Rd and 73 Grosvenor Park Road retain much of their original external character and appearance, and are good examples of the Regency inspired design, featuring shallow-pitched slate roofs, deep bracketed eaves, elegant timber sash windows with slender glazing bars, grand timber doors and classically inspired doorcases. Unlike the more modest contemporary houses nearby which are built entirely of yellow London stock bricks, these larger houses were built using both stocks and more expensive white gault bricks as a further indication of their status and the developers aspirations. As with Comely Bank previously referred to, Lyndhurst also had strong associations with the Whittingham family who for forty or fifty years had a very real influence on the social, political and religious life of Walthamstow.

Immediately adjacent to 73 Grosvenor Park Road and dating from 1929 stands the former **Employment Exchange**, later renamed Job Centre, which was converted into residential use in 2008. Designed in the neo-Georgian style popular in the 1920's/30's, and featuring red brickwork, stone dressings, multi-paned Georgian-style timber sash windows, a steeply pitched clay tiled roof and classically inspired main door & surround, the building is a good example of the type and the only building of significance dating from the inter war period that exists within the Conservation Area. As such it has a particular interest and rarity value, and adds to the diversity of building types and styles that can be found in the area.

Finally at **102 Beulah Road** there is the perfectly restored former house and yard of Amey Builders & Decorators, one of the once numerous family run businesses that thrived within the area from the 1890's until the late 20th century. Given that Amey Builders erected properties in nearby Cromwell Road it seems quite possible that they erected 102 Beulah Road as well, sometime in the 1850's/60's. The building was purchased in 2001 by a member of the Fuller family, another long established firm of local builders, and meticulously restored to its current condition, which included repainting the Amey builders banner heading on the parapet. The building today is both a surviving piece of local history and a local exemplar of building restoration.

(vii) The character and relationship of spaces within the area:

In layout the Orford Road area is a largely traditional example of ad hoc Victorian planning, with a loose grid of connecting roads and footpaths, and largely continuous built frontages. The houses are set back from the footpaths with front gardens varying in depth from a mere 1 metre in some instances to over 5 metres in the case of the largest detached villa. Some of the original privet hedges which defined the front boundary and enclosed the front gardens have survived, but not enough to recreate the original character of the streets with its clear contrast between public and private spaces.

The only “large” open spaces of special note within the area are the bowling green at the rear of Orford House, which is sadly hidden from public view behind a high timber fence, and the two areas of public open space at Vestry Road playground and the Village Square on the corner of Orford Rd/Eden Rd.

Vestry Road playground is actually a remnant of the original Church Common, and was for many years the playground for the National School. Running between the railway cutting and Vestry Road, surrounded by chain link fencing and surfaced with grey tarmac, the area has provided a valuable but visually unattractive site for childrens play for many years. It has however recently undergone a refurbishment and redesign which whilst retaining the traditional use of the site has made significant improvements to its appearance, and re-established some much needed greenery and tree planting at the western end fronting East Avenue.

The Village Square is a much smaller but equally valuable plot, originally the site of 43 & 45 Orford Road, but now an amenity open space maintained by the Walthamstow Village Residents Association. With planting beds, trees, paving and seating, this is an attractive and valuable piece of amenity space and a venue for small local events.

(viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours:

The traditional materials used in the construction of the vast majority of 19th century buildings erected within the area are yellow London stock bricks with Lime mortar, grey Welsh slates with lead flashings/soakers etc, timber doors and windows, and cast iron rainwater goods.

Yellow London stocks are by far the most prevalent bricks in the area, although locally made multi-stocks can be found on some of the earliest cottages, and red bricks and gault clay bricks can also be found, used both decoratively as string courses, diaper work etc, or as a more prestigious facing brick. With the notable exception of the Regency-style Orford House, facing brickwork was the traditional and original finish for all 19th century buildings in the area, and any rendered finish, pebble-dashing, paint or stone-cladding is a later non-original alteration.

Many properties feature artificial stone for lintols, keystones, window cills, bay windows, architraves & cornices etc. Almost invariably these features are paint-finished, usually in white or off-white, although traditionally they would often have been painted in more muted colours to resemble natural stone.

Cast-iron rainwater goods; gutters and downpipes etc, were also standard original features, much of which still survives today, although plastic replacements are now a common feature of the area. Black is the most common colour used today, although historically there would have been a greater diversity, reflecting the colour schemes of the various houses themselves.

Chimney stacks, typically topped with either yellow clay or terracotta chimney pots in variations of the common “cannon-head” style, were and remain characteristic features of the roofscape, although many have regrettably been lost over the years. Painted timber doors and windows are standard original features for all properties within the area and many still survive today. Dark colours in the Victorian tradition still predominate.

With a few notable exceptions such as the Eden Grove cottages which have side-hung timber casement windows, timber box sash windows are the original and traditional window type for nearly all other 19thc residential properties in the area. The predominant glazing pattern is the traditional 2 over 2 Victorian sash, although Orford House and the modest “St Mary’s Place” in Eden Road have multi-paned sashes in the Georgian style, and some of the larger villas have sashes with slender margin lights. All are original contemporary features.

(ix) Local Details:

The commercial and civic buildings within the area exhibit the most elaborate and fascinating details, in particular the decorative stucco-work on the Old Town Hall in Orford Road, and the even more decorative terracotta frieze and royal coat of arms which adorns the old GPO sorting office in Vestry Road. The Orford Road shops reveal a smattering of interesting details, the most noteworthy being the traditional Hovis sign that continues to adorn the former bakery on the corner of Orford Rd/Wingfield Rd, and the original glass fascia with gilded letters at 47 Orford Rd, formerly Ison’s ironmongers.

Most of the residential buildings within the Conservation Area reflect the style and design conventions of the time in which they were built, and few features of note are exclusive to this particular area. The grandeur of the classically inspired doorcases on the three surviving villas at the west end of Grosvenor Park Road, and the porticoes of 123 Grove Road (Briar House) and Comely Bank are notable exceptions however, and reflect the high aspirations of the initial mid 19thc developers, who were seeking to attract more wealthy residents to the area.

As mentioned above little original ironwork survives within the area, having been removed during the scrap metal drives of World War II. The notable exceptions are the neo Georgian railings on the former GPO Sorting Office in Vestry Road, the decorative cresting on the roof of the Old Town Hall, and on a more modest scale, two examples of decorative iron window guards in Beulah Rd and Grosvenor Park Road, rare fragments of a once commonplace feature.

Distinctive local features in the public realm include the street lighting, which is provided by retro Victorian-style lamp columns, and the Windsor “light cannon” bollards, all finished in black for ease of redecoration. Whilst not original features, by general consensus they nevertheless add to the character and appearance of the area. A definitely more original feature is the

granite-sett accessway at the rear of 63-71 Orford Rd , which now services the Arden Mews development. Setts were a once common feature of backland service tracks and Mews courts, designed to withstand the heavy wear of iron-shod horses hooves and cart-wheels, and only a few local examples still survive.

(x) The contribution made by green spaces, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements to the character of the area:

A traditional feature of local Victorian streetscapes was enclosed front gardens with privet hedges, which created a soft green edge between public and private land. Where space permitted trees were also planted in the footpaths outside of these private gardens by the local authority in the early 20thc to add some much needed greenery to what had very rapidly become a hard urban townscape.

Only fragments of front garden hedging survive today unfortunately, and the front gardens generally are much more open to public view and more likely to have higher levels of hard-paving. Where hedging does survive, or where different plant material has taken their place such as in Eden Grove, the original character is better preserved, but it no longer provides the original unifying green link that it once did and its reintroduction would have considerable beneficial effects.

In the footpaths the council continues to plant street trees where space permits and the now mature avenue of trees in Grosvenor Park Road is one of the visual delights of the area. Elsewhere smaller ornamental species have of necessity been used for street tree planting, which whilst attractive plants, do not have the visual impact of the traditional “forest-type” species originally used.

Trees on private land also contribute to the greenery of the area, forming attractive edges along much of the length of Beulah Path on the eastern boundary of the area, attractive settings for Orford House and Comely Bank, and providing welcome greenery in many public and landlocked “backland” sites.

Of considerable value both visually and in terms of ecological interest, albeit on a more intermittent basis, are the trees on the embankments of the railway cutting that largely defines the northern boundary of the Conservation Area. These embankments are largely unmanaged and over the years become home to small woodlands of self-sown trees & shrubs, with associated wildlife. As Railway-owned “operational land” however the trees cannot be protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and are therefore vulnerable to periodic clearance or unskilled lopping by the railway company whenever the plant cover is considered to interfere with the operation of the line, despite local opposition. As a result, whilst a valuable visual and ecological resource, it is potentially a more vulnerable and less permanent one.

(xi) The setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside, including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate:

The Conservation Area is located to the south of the historic village centre of old Walthamstow, on land that slopes almost imperceptibly southwards and westwards towards the Lea valley. The northern boundary is largely defined by the railway cutting and the rows of trees which have established on the banks, forming an attractive green corridor and a haven for wildlife. The other boundaries largely merge into the urban grain of the surrounding streets, although Beulah Path forms a significant part of the eastern boundary of the area, a narrow footpath running along the end of the rear gardens and benefitting from a number of attractive mature trees that overhang the walls and fences.

With the exception of the attractive tree-lined view up and down Grosvenor Park Road, long views into and out of the area are severely limited by the irregular street pattern and the tight urban grain. Some shorter views of significance do however exist, most notably those to and from St Mary's churchyard at the northernmost section of Orford Rd, the view up Orford Road from the west towards Orford House and the shops beyond, and the more modest longer views along Beulah Path.

In general the key buildings within the area cannot be seen from any great distance because of the tight urban layout, and their presence, particularly that of the old Town Hall and Orford House is a source of surprise and delight when stumbled on by visitors to the area.

(xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage, i.e. the negative factors:

The Conservation Area has almost inevitably suffered to some extent from misinformed and unsympathetic alterations to numerous buildings both before and after designation in 1990. Since 2004 however external changes to dwelling houses have largely been controlled by an Article 4(2) Direction, so to a large extent the gradual erosion of the special character of the area has been arrested, and in many cases original features are now being reinstated, often with a financial contribution from the council.

Two of the most widespread and harmful changes carried out over the years have however been to original roofs and windows, with inappropriate concrete tiles replacing the original natural slate coverings in many cases, and crudely detailed picture windows or casements in UPVC, timber or aluminium being used to replace the original timber sash windows.

Inappropriate front doors, whether UPVC or mass-produced hardwood examples of dubious style have also replaced the original four-panel Victorian examples in numerous cases.

Unsightly satellite dishes continue to be a visual problem in the area despite being unauthorised, as enforcement action has failed to keep pace with the increasing number of transgressions.

White plastic gas meter boxes are a similarly unattractive and inappropriate modern intrusion into the area, and whilst now controlled by the Article 4 Direction a significant number have already been installed.

Beyond the scope of planning powers to control but even more widespread a visual problem are the large and ungainly plastic Wheely bins which clutter up the majority of front gardens in the area. Their harmful visual impact is particularly pronounced in the front gardens of the smaller properties, where they are harder to conceal and where their use is particularly inappropriate.

The loss of decorative ironwork during the scrap metal drives of World War II undoubtedly had a negative impact on the original appearance of the streetscene, and only a few isolated fragments survive today.

Increased levels of traffic and parking have inevitably had an adverse impact on the special character or appearance of the area, Orford Road being particularly badly affected by through traffic. The recent extension to the Controlled Parking Zone has however had some beneficial impact in reducing overall parking levels during the working day.

The gradual loss of front boundary walls and hedging, and the paving over of some of the larger front gardens for off-street parking has inevitably contributed to the loss of front gardens and the erosion of the traditional division between private garden and public street, although this is now controlled under the Article 4 Direction.

In the public realm the poor quality and condition of the footpaths, which are finished in plain tarmac, continues to undermine other physical improvements to both building frontages and street furniture. With the exception of the paved section outside the old Town Hall this is probably most obvious along Orford Road, where the patched appearance of the tarmac reflects very poorly on the increasing efforts of many local businesses to upgrade the appearance of their shopfronts. An additional public realm issue raised by a number of residents is that of dogs fouling the footpaths.

Shopfronts themselves have not been immune from ill considered alterations, with a small number of Aluminium or UPVC shopfronts having replaced the original timber examples, and a small number of inappropriate external security grilles also being in evidence. All these unsympathetic changes detract from the originality of the shopping parade and its special character and appearance.

Away from Orford Road where the council is seeking to retain all the surviving commercial units, the decline in commercial activity in the area over the years has resulted in twenty two, or almost two thirds of the former shops being converted, usually into residential use. Some of the earliest conversions are

particularly poor visually, with ill-proportioned and inappropriate windows replacing the old shopfronts, and pebble-dash or paint concealing the non-matching brick or blockwork used in the adaptation.

Whilst properties within the Conservation Area are generally well maintained, the physical condition of a number of particular properties is also a cause for concern, most notably 123 Grove Road (Briar House), 38 Orford Road and the upper floors of No71, and 21 & 26 Grosvenor Park Road. Refurbishment and regular maintenance of these properties would bring considerable benefits to the wider area.

Properties immediately outside the Conservation Area can also impact on the quality of the area, whether positively or negatively. The stark galvanised railings recently erected outside the Chalmers House flats at 42 Orford Road have undoubtedly had a negative effect on both the setting of the Listed Orford House opposite and on the long view up Orford Road into the commercial area. Another prominently sited building which detracts from the special character and appearance of the area is 123 Grove Road, located on the corner of Beulah Road. A potentially attractive corner shop, its current use, and the repeated unauthorised car breaking/car repairs carried out at the rear and which frequently spreads into Beulah Road, is a recurring problem and currently subject to enforcement action.

(xiii) The existence of any neutral areas:

The Conservation Area is almost totally developed, and there are few buildings or spaces within it that could be considered to neither enhance nor detract from the special character or appearance of the area. The only building which could with justification be described as “neutral” is probably the single storey council-owned building on the corner of Beulah Road/Orford Rd, within the former grounds of the adjacent “Lyndhurst”. This modest building, whilst performing an admirable social function, is architecturally non-descript and contributes little to the local streetscape despite its prominent location.

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CONSERVATION OFFICER

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Orford Road Conservation Area

(i) Legislative background

The designation of a Conservation Area and production of an Appraisal document is not an end in itself. The Appraisal provides the basis for developing management proposals for the Conservation Area that fulfil the general duty placed on the local authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, now formalised in BV 219c, to draw up and publish such proposals. The purpose of this document is to present draft proposals which seek to achieve the preservation and enhancement of the special character of the Conservation Area, informed by the Appraisal, for consultation. The special qualities of the Conservation Area have been identified as part of the appraisal process in the first part of this document, and both will be subject to monitoring and review. This guidance draws on the themes identified in the Appraisal, and satisfies the statutory requirement of section 71(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, namely:

“It shall be the duty of the local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas”.

This document reflects Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 “Planning and the Historic Environment”, English Heritage guidance set out in “Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas”, policies within the Waltham Forest Unitary Development Plan 2006, and guidance contained in the published Conservation Area leaflet for the Orford Road Conservation Area.

(ii) Statutory controls

Designation as a Conservation Area brings with it a degree of additional statutory protection under planning legislation aimed at assisting the “preservation or enhancement” of the area. These controls include the need for Conservation Area consent for the demolition of any unlisted buildings, the need for Listed Building consent for most works to Listed buildings in the area, planning consent for the installation of satellite dishes visible from the street, significantly reduced “permitted development rights” for alterations or extensions of dwelling houses, and the need for 6 weeks written notice of works to trees not already protected by Tree Preservation Orders. In 2004 an Article 4(2) Direction was made on the area which removed

certain additional “permitted development rights” normally enjoyed by householders, and as a result planning permission is also now required for nearly all works which affect the external appearance of dwellinghouses within the area. These restrictions are outlined in more detail in the Council’s guidance leaflet “Orford Road Conservation Area” and the relevant Article 4 (2) Direction. It should be noted that flats and commercial premises do not enjoy “permitted development rights”, and nearly all external works which would materially affect the appearance of flats, shops and other business uses within the area require planning permission.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that new development within the Conservation Area preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area in accordance with policy BHE13 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006, the Orford Road Conservation Area leaflet, and other published guidance.

(iii) Erosion of character and additional planning control

The Conservation Area Appraisal identified the following as issues which pose a threat to, or detract from, the special character of the Conservation Area:

- The high levels of car parking and through traffic within the area.
- Inappropriate alterations to roofs, windows and doors.
- The high number of unauthorised satellite dishes located on street frontages.
- The plastic Wheely bins left outside some properties within the area.
- External white plastic meter boxes.
- Loss of front garden walls and hedging.
- Poor quality & condition of footpaths, particularly Orford Road.
- Poor condition of certain properties within the Conservation Area.

Fortunately there are few examples of unauthorised works having been carried out, which could detract from the special character or appearance of the area. Where such works have occurred, or do occur in the future however, the Council will continue to take appropriate enforcement action, where it is expedient, to remove them or seek a retrospective application where appropriate.

The Council has published a Conservation Area Guidance leaflet for residents and businesses within the Orford Road Conservation Area, and subject to resources provides financial assistance towards the cost of repair or restoration of original features to buildings in the area by means of Historic Buildings Grants. It also made an Article 4(2) Direction on the area in 2004 to ensure that all future external alterations to the street elevations of dwellinghouses within the area were brought under planning control.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that unauthorised development is subject to effective enforcement action wherever practicable, to protect the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Action: Within budgetary limits the Council will continue to offer Historic Buildings Grants for the repair or restoration of buildings of architectural or historic interest within the Conservation Area. Specifically, properties within the area that have been

unsympathetically altered over the years or are in poor condition will be targeted to try to secure the desired improvements raised in the Appraisal.

Action: Ascham Homes will be approached to try to secure better levels of maintenance for properties within the area for which they are responsible.

Action: The Council should review the refuse and recycling collection arrangements within the Conservation Area to minimise the visual harm caused by Wheely bins to its special character and appearance.

Action: National Gas suppliers will be reminded that white plastic meter boxes sited on elevations fronting the highway are not acceptable in the Conservation Area.

nb: Highway issues; traffic, parking, footpaths, street furniture etc are dealt with under (vii) Public Realm & Enhancement.

(iv) *Shopfronts, advertisements and signage*

There are three public houses, and over thirty other shops and businesses within the Conservation Area that have or are likely to require a degree of signage/advertisement for their services or activities. It is important that strict controls are maintained over the design, size and siting of signage and advertising in order to preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of the wider Conservation Area.

Action: The Council will ensure that all shopfront, advertising and signage proposals that require planning consent will respect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in terms of siting, size, number, materials, colours, illumination etc in accordance with UDP and other best practice guidance. Wherever possible the Council will take enforcement action against unauthorised shopfronts, advertising and signage which does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

(v) *Trees*

Trees have been identified in the Appraisal as a major contributory factor to the special character & appearance of the Conservation Area. If not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order, anyone intending to lop or fell a tree within the Conservation Area greater than 100mm in diameter at 1.5 metres above ground level, is required to give the Council 6 weeks written notice before starting work. This provides the Council with an opportunity of assessing the tree to see if it makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, in which case a Tree Preservation Order may be served. (The railway company however has exemption from this statutory requirement). Free professional advice on all tree issues, whether the pruning of existing trees or simply advice on suitable species for planting, is always available from the Council Trees & Nature Conservation Officer 0208 496 2819.

Action: The Council will serve a Tree Preservation Order in appropriate cases where a tree of high amenity value is considered to be under threat. These will include trees

both within and outside the area where they contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area or views identified in the Appraisal. The Council will maintain and replace as necessary the street trees within the Conservation Area, and continue to provide free professional advice on all tree matters as and when required.

(vi) *Setting and views*

The largely urban context of the Conservation Area; it's "setting", is important, and development which would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area or its setting, or which would impact detrimentally on views into and out of the area will be resisted. The important views are identified in the Character Appraisal, and the Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects these views.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects the setting of the Conservation Area any important views within, into, and out of the area identified in the Appraisal. These will be protected from inappropriate forms of development.

(vii) *The public realm and enhancement*

With the exception of some backland developments such as Arden Mews, the Appraisal has identified little in the way of surviving original floorscape within the Conservation Area, and the majority of the roads and footpaths have been surfaced using tarmac. The reinstatement of traditional paving flags for the footpaths within the area would greatly enhance its special character and appearance. This would have particular benefits along Orford Road, and would reinforce the special identity of the area.

Lighting within the Conservation Area is on the whole provided by replica "Victorian pattern" streetlights installed by the Council since designation in 1990, which are generally considered to be attractive and make a positive contribution to the special character of the area.

The issue of dogs fouling the footpaths was identified in the Appraisal as an unsightly and unhygienic local problem that needed to be better addressed than is currently the case.

The high levels of car parking and through traffic within the Conservation Area was also identified in the Appraisal as issues which detracts from its character & appearance, and more needs to be done to address these.

A detailed audit of the public realm should be undertaken to identify any redundant features, opportunities for enhancement etc, subject to resources.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that any surviving historic streetscape features are retained, and that any future highway works will bring a positive improvement to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with the spirit of the English Heritage "Streets for all" campaign. In this regard all

street lighting upgrades should use only “Victorian style” fittings to match those already in place.

Action: Efforts will be made to secure funding for repaving works within the area, starting with Orford Road, with the ultimate aim of replacing all tarmac footpaths with traditional paving flags.

Action: The Council will make greater efforts to address the problem of dogs fouling the footpaths within the area using its powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

Action: The Council should review the traffic management scheme currently in place within the Conservation Area, and the impact & extent of the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ,) to see what further improvements if any can be made to address the issues of through traffic and on-street parking.

(viii) *Monitoring and review*

The following actions should be taken to ensure that the Appraisal and Management plan are accepted and acted upon:

- ***Public Consultation: The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management plan was the subject of a period of public consultation, and views expressed as part of that process were considered when preparing this final draft for Council adoption. Consultation included placing copies of the documents on the council’s website, consultation with local residents, residents associations and amenity groups, and providing hard copies on request. A letter advising of these arrangements was delivered to all properties in the area by mail shot.***
- ***Boundary review: The Council will maintain the current boundary of the Conservation Area and continue to review it over time in accordance with current Best Practice and guidance on the management of the historic environment produced by English Heritage.***
- ***Document review: This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:***
 - (i) ***A survey of the Conservation Area and its boundaries***
 - (ii) ***An updated “heritage count” comprising a comprehensive photographic record.***
 - (iii) ***An assessment of whether the management proposals detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements.***
 - (iv) ***The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and proposed actions and amendments.***
 - (v) ***Public consultation on the review findings, any proposed changes, and input into the final review***

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