



SYSTON CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

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INTRODUCTION

Syston is a small industrial town within the Borough of Charnwood. The Conservation Area was designated in October 1975, an area of 11 ha, composed of the historic settlement on either side of the High Street and bounded by the Melton Road. The Area includes a broad range of buildings, domestic, commercial, public and industrial, from the 17th century to the present day, based on a mediaeval pattern of streets including a village green. The town was described in White's Directory of 1846 as a 'large and well built village upon a pleasant declivity'. The substantial Victorian and 20th century industrialisation and urban expansion of the settlement is not included in the Area.

The purpose of this appraisal is to examine the historical development of the Conservation Area and to describe its present character and appearance in order to assess its special architectural and historic interest. The appraisal is used to inform the consideration of management and development proposals within the Area.

PLANNING POLICIES

A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance should be preserved or enhanced. In making decisions on potential development within a conservation area, the Council is required to 'pay attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area'. Permission will not be granted for proposals that are likely to harm the character or appearance of a conservation area. Sections 69 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment says that special attention should be paid when considering proposals for development in a conservation area.

Planning Policy Statement 9: Requires that planning policies and decisions not only avoid, mitigate or compensate for harm but also seek ways to enhance, restore and add to biodiversity and geodiversity.

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands published in March 2005 advises local authorities to develop strategies that avoid damage to the region's cultural assets. Policy 27: Protecting and Enhancing The Region's Natural and Cultural Assets.

The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996 to 2016, published in December 2004, seeks to identify, protect, preserve and enhance areas, sites, buildings and settings of historic or architectural interest or archaeological importance. Development within conservation areas should preserve or enhance their character and appearance. Environment Policy 2: Sites and Buildings of Historic Architectural and Archaeological Interest.

The Borough of Charnwood Local Plan 1991 – 2006 adopted in January 2004 seeks to ensure that new development in conservation areas preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area. Policy EV/10.

LOCATION AND SETTING

CONTEXT AND POPULATION

Syston lies 5 miles north-east of Leicester. The town is one of a string of settlements in the Wreake valley between Leicester and Melton. Syston lies just north of the Barkby Brook, close to the confluence of the Wreake and the Soar. Fosse Way is half a mile to the west.

The population of Syston has varied over time. Records in the Victoria County History of Leicestershire show that the population rose steadily from an estimated population of about 30 people in the Domesday Survey of 1086, to 367 people in the late seventeenth century (1679 Ecclesiastical Returns) followed by a more rapid growth throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from 1,124 people in 1801; to 1,656 by 1861; 2,930 by 1901; and then to 5,508 by 1951. The most recent parish profile published by Leicestershire County Council shows there that were 11,608 people residing in the parish of Syston at the time of the 2001 Census.

GENERAL CHARACTER AND PLAN FORM

Syston occupies an area of generally flat land that falls gently towards the Barkby Brook. In its wider context the town sits on the edge of the broad valley of the river Wreake. The highest part of the town, to the north of High Street, is occupied by St Peter's Church. The present pattern of streets within the Conservation Area is a product of the historical development of the settlement which, from the earliest times, developed as a small, nucleated village clustered around the Church. The village green is still an important and identifiable open space at the centre of the Area. The main street is High Street, which runs westwards from Melton Road to join Fosse Way. There are subtle changes in the direction and width of High Street along its length. The most obvious are the large opening of The Green and the pinch point as one approaches the Green from Melton Road. It is this feature of the mediaeval pattern which gives the settlement much of its character.

The gateway from the Foss is a widening marked by The Queen Victoria public house, from where the street narrows and curves to run through a Victorian terrace to The Green where the key building is a fine Georgian town house set back from the pavement with its own front yard, now occupied by the Conservative Club. After the pinch point, which itself is marked by a low thatched cottage, at one time a public house, there is another widening leading to the junction with Upper Church Street and School Street. Here the principal buildings are the large Victorian house, no 26, set well away from the street in its own garden protected by a brick wall and the Methodist Church opposite the junction with Walkers Way. Beyond this the street narrows between the shops on either side to end in the focal space of the junction with Melton Road.

Springing from the High Street is a closed network of streets running northwards around the old manor house, no. 16 Bath Street, and the Church, and a series of streets running southwards towards the Brook. All these streets have subtle changes in direction and width. Lower Church Street has a pleasant opening at the front of the church with views through the trees of the churchyard to Upper Church Street. Chapel Street has a broad opening halfway along its length fronted by two fine Georgian three storey houses. The street then curves away down towards the brook past the Dog and Gun public house. School Street also curves gently downhill past the single storey primary school which is now the Town Council offices and Community Centre.

This historic core forms the basis of the Conservation Area within which there is a significant number of surviving domestic and commercial buildings dating from the late sixteenth century through to the present day that contribute to the special architectural and historic interest of the Area. There are 28 listed buildings (see Appendix). St Peter's Church is listed Grade I, the others are Grade II including low brick cottages, some of them thatched, town-houses and houses with swithland slate roofs. Amongst these are modern terraced houses, three storey blocks of flats and industrial yards often bounded by high brick walls.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

Whilst there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Conservation Area, the Area encompasses the core mediaeval settlement, and the pattern of streets and the nature of the properties would suggest that there is considerable archaeological potential both below ground and surviving in the fabric of many of the standing buildings.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Syston has its origins as a Saxon settlement and, although there is little physical evidence of this earlier habitation in the town, colonisation in the Wreake Valley from the sixth century can be discerned. Notably, a distinctive feature of many Anglo-Saxon settlements were their village greens and such a green still survives in Syston.

The origin of the name Syston is not clear. At the time of the Domesday Survey the village was known as Sitestone and it had a mill and a priest, indicating the likely presence of a church. The present parish church, dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, dates from its rebuilding during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the nave and tower built in a Perpendicular style and the chancel rebuilt later in a Decorated style. The Church was originally controlled by Ulverscroft Priory but after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s control, together with the right to collect tithes, passed to the University of Oxford. The Church was heavily restored in the 1870s and 1880s.

The early mediaeval development of the town was associated with agriculture, particularly on the productive light and sandy soils to the south, with the villagers reliant on the open fields system. Crops were rotated between three fields, the North, South and Middle (to the east) fields, supplemented by large areas of meadow alongside the rivers Soar and Wreake and with communal grazing rights on the Great Moor to the north-east of the village.

The open fields were enclosed in the 1777, with some 248 acres of land allotted to Oxford University, making it one of the largest local landowners. The enclosure of the open fields had a profound effect on the local landscape with small hedged fields replacing the original open fields. The effect was felt by the local economy: local landowners were no longer tied to community needs and were able to convert former arable land into more profitable pasture land for the rearing of livestock for sale in local markets, particularly Leicester. The Leicester Advertiser noted that inhabitants of the village were described as 'reputable graziers' in Throsby's Excursions in Leicestershire, 1790 and the Leicestershire crop returns for 1801 show that out of some 1768 acres only 301 acres were used for arable farming (Hoskins, 1948).

A snapshot of Syston at this time is provided by the 1778 Enclosure Awards Map (reproduced in Barker et al, pp. 24-25, 2000) which shows a settlement concentrated along the High Street from Melton Road as far west to what is now Turn Street, with smaller streets of houses running to the north and south of High Street. This historic street pattern was still in place at the time of the 1884 Ordnance Survey plan; over the intervening 100 years there had been little development beyond the 1778 village limits except around the junction of Barkby Road and Melton Road and some new terraced development to the south of Barkby Brook.

The enclosure of the open fields removed the traditional reliance and dependency on the land. Communal grazing rights were lost and many of the new holdings were too small to be viable so that many villagers were forced to look for new employment. The arrival of the Soar Navigation canal in 1792 and the railway and its accompanying station in 1840 improved the transport links with Leicester and allowed new industrial enterprises to develop in the village and also gave people the opportunity to travel to work in Leicester.

The first notable industry was framework knitting which developed during the eighteenth century in a number of rural centres along the Soar and Wreake valleys, being first recorded in Syston in the period after 1750 (Parker, 1955). The increased demands for hosiery, particularly due to the Napoleonic Wars, led to a growing dependency on the hosiery trade. Framework knitting employed whole families, men on the frame, women seaming and children winding wool onto bobbins, working at home or in small backyard workshops as out-workers for the factories in Leicester. By 1844, 380 frames were recorded in the village (Parker, 1955) and the 1846 Directory notes that there were many framework knitters employed chiefly by Leicester manufacturers. The Topographical Dictionary of England (1848) noted that: 'the manufacture of stockings affords employment to about 400 persons' and according to the 1891 Census, framework knitting was the main source of employment in the village.

There is little visible evidence of this industry in the town today but a range of long windows in the gable end of no. 4 Chapel Street are indicative of a domestic workshop, and there also appears to be evidence of a domestic workshop, dated 1904, behind no. 16 Turn Street.

Growth in the town through the nineteenth century was reflected in the improvements to local services. A gas works was established in 1859 and new community facilities were built with the opening of the Parochial School in 1856. Before this an infants school had been built in 1817 and a number of chapels of which the Wesleyan chapel of 1797 on Chapel Street still survives. The Baptist chapel of 1818 and Primitive Methodist chapel of 1836 have been demolished.

By the end of the nineteenth century the hosiery trade was in decline as much of the industry had been moved into new factories in Leicester. However, new employment opportunities were offered by the development of the boot and shoe industry. The boot and shoe manufacturers of Leicester were attracted by the supply of unemployed hosiery labour with a tradition of homeworking and skills that could be transferred to the manufacture of boots and shoes. By the turn of the twentieth century new factories for the manufacture of boots and shoes had been set up in Syston, the largest being opened by Eatough's in 1921. By 1956/7, 270 people were employed in the industry and, whilst not as large as the neighbouring Sileby, it was larger than most other County towns.

As the twentieth century progressed, the boot and shoe industry, like the previous hosiery trade declined. However, Syston as a town contains significant industry, some of it located in the Conservation Area. There are small factories and workshops representing for the most the service and building industries.

All these industries caused a rapid growth in the local population and a surge of house building, expanding the settlement to the west and south of the Conservation Area. Throughout the rapid urbanisation of the village there was little encroachment into the historic core save for a boot factory at the end of Brook Street and a hosiery factory off School Street. The present Conservation Area therefore reflects the basic historic street pattern that had been established by the end of the eighteenth century and contains many of the buildings that had been built in the town between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

HISTORIC AND PREVAILING LAND USES

The present activities and land uses within the Conservation Area reflect its historical development and its importance at the centre of the community. As is typical of many historic settlements, these include a range of commercial, industrial and residential uses that developed alongside each other over time and are now well integrated into the urban fabric.

Historically, the most important building was the parish church which would have been at the focus of village life into the eighteenth century. With the growth of non-conformity, new places of worship were built and of these, the former Wesleyan Chapel on Chapel Street and the Methodist Church on High Street survive. Other community buildings such as schools were built, including the early nineteenth century infants school at the end of School Street. Whilst the original buildings of the school have been much altered and linked by more modern buildings, they serve today as a community centre and Parish Council offices.

The village centre also had a range of shops and public houses that were concentrated around The Green and the eastern end of the High Street. These two areas form an important part of a vibrant shopping centre in the town.

The principal residential areas developed at the western end of High Street and in the tight network of streets on either side of the High Street, around the Church and extending towards the Barkby Brook. These streets offer a broad range of houses both in style and age, with good examples of vernacular thatched cottages, such as at no. 57 and no. 72 High Street and no. 16 Turn Street; polite Georgian townhouses, as on Lower Church Street, The Green and Chapel Street, and later Victorian properties added as the village began to grow in the nineteenth century.

Some industrial activity is represented in the central core. Framework knitting and shoe making was usually carried out in domestic workshops and the windows in the gable end of no. 4 Chapel Street are indicative of a domestic workshop and there is evidence of workshops built behind frontage properties, such as at no. 16 Turn Street. There is a group of freestanding workshops at no. 70 High Street and, whilst they presently look rather rundown, the granite rubble sidewall and partial Swithland slate roof suggest that they are of some historical interest.

To service the present commercial area a number of open car parks have been laid out within the Conservation Area.

PREVALENT AND TRADITIONAL BUILDING MATERIALS

Despite the loss of many thatched cottages in the later half of the twentieth century (photographs of the original buildings are recorded in Barker et al, 2000) there are a significant number of early properties surviving in the Area. Dating from between the 15th or 16th century, these are principally of timber-frame construction, although most have been altered with the use of roughcast render or brick to reface the timber frame, and a good proportion still have a thatched roof. Some of the best examples are found at no. 10 The Green, no. 2 Bath Street, nos. 33, 57 & 72 High Street, no. 14 Chapel Street and no. 16 Turn Street. At no. 16 Bath Street, the external timber frame has been infilled with herringbone brickwork and the roof covered with Welsh slate.

The predominant building material in the Conservation Area is brick, which characterises the buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and provides a uniformity of material and appearance throughout the Conservation Area. In most properties the brick is laid in Flemish bond, the pattern of which in some cases is emphasised by the use of contrasting headers and stretchers, such as at no. 3 Brook Street, claimed to be an early example of brick vernacular building (Hoskins, 1970), no. 5 Chapel Street, nos. 1 & 3 Barkby Road and no. 10 Lower Church Street.

Brick is used to provide decoration, such as in two of the oldest buildings: diaper work is used to decorate the gable and principal street elevation of no. 7 Lower Church Street and a single diaper pattern can be seen in the gable of no. 2 Bath Street. Many properties also have horizontal brick string courses between the first and ground floor windows such as at no. 18 Bath Street and no. 75 High Street, the Conservative Club. There are projecting courses of moulded brick such as at no. 3 Brook Street and at no. 7 Lower Church Street which follows the Wreake Valley tradition of semi-circular hoods over the windows, (McWhirr, 1997, pp. 49). There are dentil brick courses as at nos. 2 & 17 Bath Street.

The Church is the only building in the village to be built entirely of stone, using granite rubble for its main walls with white limestone dressings. A number of buildings have rubble stone plinths that may originally have supported a timber frame but now contribute to the visual proportions of the properties. Granite rubble has also been used to construct the rear wall of the outbuildings at no. 70 High Street, which are also partly covered by Swithland slate in the roof.

Besides the thatched roof properties, Welsh slate is the predominant roofing material, sometimes finished with terracotta ridge tiles and finials, such as at no. 16 Turn Street. Welsh slate is however a mass-produced material of the nineteenth century, relying on the railways for its distribution. Before its widespread use, there was a reliance on locally available materials, such as Swithland slate. A substantial number of roofs in the Area are still covered in Swithland slate, which is typically laid in diminishing courses to spread the weight of the tiles, such as at nos. 5 & 19 Chapel Street, no. 75 High Street along with its attached barn and outbuildings, and nos. 1259 & 1261 Melton Road.

There has been a good survival of historic joinery with a range of original windows and doors, features that define the appearance of properties and are integral to their appearance. Timber sash windows are common in the Area and they provide a strong vertical emphasis and are mostly used in polite Georgian townhouses and Victorian properties, such as at no. 75 High Street, no. 2 Brook Street, no. 5 Chapel Street, no. 1259 Melton Road and no. 2 Lower Church Street. The more traditional vernacular cottages use casement windows and there are some good examples of surviving Yorkshire sliding sash windows in the upper floors of no. 10 The Green, no. 17 Bath Street, the Fox and Hounds public house on High Street and no. 3 Brook Street. No. 21 High Street has an interesting variety of window styles, with tripartite sash windows on the ground floor and mullion and transom windows on the first floor, with a horizontal sliding opening light in the lower frame.

Window openings are typically defined by arches and projecting cills. The arches are in a variety of styles. There are gauged brick arches at nos. 1 & 3 Barkby Road, no. 93 High Street and no. 5 Chapel Street and segmental brick arches at nos. 73 & 95 High Street, with the use of flat stone arches at no. 97 High Street and no. 19 Chapel Street.

As well as timber windows, there are good examples of timber panel doors, sometimes partially glazed, and many with fanlights above. Some of the best examples can be seen at no. 33 Bath Street, nos. 47 and 57 High Street, nos. 22 & 24 Lower Church Street and no. 12 The Green.

As a longstanding commercial area, a particular feature of High Street is the large number of surviving timber shop fronts that make a significant visual contribution to the historic character of the Area. Typical shop fronts range from relatively simple designs where shop windows are framed by a plain architrave and a fascia board between paired brackets, such as at no. 14 High Street, the Post Office, and no. 8 The Green, Mortgage Solutions. However, care must be taken in assuming the age of these shop fronts as photographs would suggest that they are not original, the Post Office having had different windows in 1920 (photograph in Barker et al, 2000, pp. 31) and no. 8 The Green has been refurbished since 1960 (front cover photograph in Barker et al, 2000). Examples of more modest shop fronts, with decorated pilasters supporting brackets either side of a fascia, can be seen at nos. 10 & 12 High Street, Harrison Murray and Age Concern. However, since the building appeared to be in residential use in the 1920s, the shop fronts must post-date 1920 (photograph in Barker et al, 2000, pp. 31).

The most elaborate shop fronts are found on the purpose-built Victorian shop units at no. 6 High Street, Interflora, no. 8 High Street, High Street Hair, and no. 14 The Green, Match Catch. These appear to be original Victorian shop fronts, with recessed doors, distinctive stall risers and pilasters with console brackets supporting a tilted fascia and, in the case of no. 14 The Green, an original sun-blind and ventilator strip.

LOCAL DETAILS

An interesting and recurring architectural feature found throughout the whole of the Conservation Area is the range and variety of surviving external door surrounds, of which there are more than twenty. In some cases these are quite simple door surrounds of moulded timber architraves around the outside of the door, such as at no. 57 High Street and no. 8 Lower Church Street. However, most are more elaborate often with flat canopies supported by console brackets such as at no. 3 Brook Street, nos. 21 & 73 High Street, no. 18 Lower Church Street and nos. 8 & 10 The Green. The most elaborate are found on the polite Georgian townhouses such as no. 5 Chapel Street, which has a six panelled door framed by a tall elegant surround with an architrave, with applied clustered shafts, and incised console brackets supporting a flat canopy; while at no. 59 High Street the six panelled door is framed by a radial fanlight with an open pediment supported on reeded shafts; and at no. 10 Lower Church Street the six panelled door has a semi-circular fanlight with a moulded timber architrave with applied clustered shafts and consoles supporting a flat canopy.

In some cases the door surrounds have survived even where the house has been altered, such as no. 46 High Street and no. 14 Lower Church Street. The timber surrounds make a unique contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and add to the collective wealth and variety of architectural details within it.

There are several surviving old street name plates on the sides of houses at first floor level. They are from two periods, with different styles but both painted black with white lettering.

In Chapel Street and Bath Street there are high brick boundary walls. The former serves to guide the eye towards the Dog and Gun.

At Brookside alongside the Brook there is a significant surviving stretch of granite sett paving.

VIEWS AND VISTAS

Because the town is well developed there is little opportunity for expansive vistas across the fields.

The view west from the High Street is terminated by the railway bridge. The views up and down Melton Road are nearly always dominated by traffic. Along High Street, Bath Street, Lower Church Street, Chapel Street, the curves and variations of width in the streets create a changing scene. There are glimpses into yards and views of rear walls and roofs of houses. Occasionally the church tower can be seen peeping over the tops of houses or walls. Syston has few houses over two storeys and often the storey heights are low. There is a sense of enclosure. The taller buildings are set at wider places in the street.

TREES, GREEN SPACES & BIODIVERSITY

Most of the trees in the Conservation Area are associated either with the churchyard or Barkby Brook. The relatively undisturbed churchyard is a good place of quiet which provides a habitat for wildlife. Trees are also found in many neighbouring gardens so that there is a substantial corridor of habitat north of the High Street.

Barkby Brook forms a wildlife corridor which connects the Conservation Area to the wider countryside and, despite having been heavily engineered, it functions as a valuable habitat and as a dispersal route for many species. Beyond the brook, and therefore outside the Conservation Area, is the large expanse of Central Park which is the principal breathing space for the town.

The north-eastern part of the Conservation Area is adjacent to Syston Marsh, a series of Local Wildlife Sites of high ecological interest consisting of wet woodland and marsh constituting two priority habitats in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan

South of the High Street, the Area contains several large spaces which are used as car parks or industrial yards. In addition, throughout the Area, the rear gardens of private houses occasionally create a sense of green space from the street, though bounded by walls or railings.

WEAKNESSES

There are a number of aspects of Syston Conservation Area which disrupt the historic continuity. Firstly, but not in order of precedence, is the modern intrusion of blocks of flats which do not respect the street patterns. The flats are designed as rectangular boxes which inevitably leave large areas of blank space, grassed over, with standardised shrubs and birch trees which do not enhance historic Syston. The flats are unrelated to the street, they do not follow the curving lines and the access is from private courtyards.

There is also some suburban housing, in High Street and Upper Church Street which has disturbed the grain and character; terraces or semis which remove themselves from the street scene by placing a front garden between the building and the pavement.

Secondly, a decision has been taken that the streets are for traffic flow. The result is a domination by kerblines and other traffic management features which attempt to carve parallel lines through the grace of the curving and variable streets. While it is recognised that traffic should be able to move through the Area, the streets have other functions which are just as important. They are places for people to see each other in public, to meet, to stroll in, to go shopping in.

Thirdly, the desire for car parking has created gaping holes in the village grain. This is especially so behind Town Square where, together with the effect of the blocks of flats opposite, the nature of Syston as a close community has been badly damaged. Unfortunately, there are other smaller spaces where the sense of enclosure by the street has been lost, Chapel Street, School Street, Upper Church Street.

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

The Syston Conservation Area was designated in October 1975 by Charnwood Borough Council. The Conservation Area boundary has not been reviewed since the original designation. Preliminary survey work has confirmed that a re-examination of the boundary is long overdue. It is clear that the designated area boundary is in places incoherent, particularly in respect of Brookside.

The present boundary of the area is somewhat arbitrary and would benefit from redefinition in certain areas. In particular there are two areas where the boundary could be amended:

Nos. 26 and 32 Upper Church Street stand on the east side of the street opposite the churchyard. The present boundary runs along the west side of Upper Church Street along the edge of the churchyard. Whilst the two buildings are listed and therefore protected, they are of architectural and historic interest and provide an attractive backdrop to the Church and the churchyard. They should be included in the Conservation Area.

Nos. 2 to 14 Turn Street form a group of buildings that have the character of Almshouses. These buildings and the forecourt area make a significant contribution to the street scene and should be included within the conservation area.

The boundary along Brookside is incoherent and convoluted. Consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of the whole of Brookside, including the trees along the park boundary as these have a significant impact on the character on Brookside. It is suggested that the area along Barkby Brook to the railway bridge over the Brook is also considered.

GENERAL CONDITION

High Street and the immediate roads off it are potentially the most historically interesting and characterful part of Syston town centre. The appraisal reveals that, although the overall condition of the built fabric when viewed from the street frontage appears reasonable, some buildings have suffered from ill conceived restoration works, particularly the inappropriate replacement of roofing materials, windows and doors, has caused significant harm to the traditional character of the area.

The appraisal has also highlighted the fact that some traditional shop fronts survive but they are in reasonable condition but are vulnerable to inappropriate repair and replacement.

Some past repair work to the historic fabric of the area has been executed by inexpert contractors, cheaply and without consideration or knowledge of good conservation practice.

The targeting of favourable grants through the Council's Historic Building Grant Scheme, may provide a persuasive incentive to property owners to undertake necessary repairs and to consider improvements, such as the authentic reinstatement of architectural features. It will also give the Council the opportunity to advise on good practice, to control the standard of work and to monitor the quality of its execution.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT

A comprehensive approach is needed to address the generally poor quality and neglected condition of many of the public spaces and highways within the area. Possible enhancement opportunities are listed below. It is not an exhaustive set of proposals but the major areas of need have been identified.

An opportunity will be sought to work with the County Council and local people to improve the nature of High Street and Melton Road as a place for people and vehicles.

Investigate the opportunity for environmental enhancement along Brookside and south side of the Barkby Brook and consider improving pedestrian and cycle links from here to the town centre.

Review and repair landscape features within the car park in front of Harrisons Row

The Borough Council has adopted a Percent for Art Policy and has also created an annual budget of £25,000 for public art within Charnwood. It is intended to work with Charnwood Arts to involve artists in environmental improvements.

Table of Proposed Actions

Conservation Area Issue	Proposed Action	Lead Partner	Other Partners
Incoherent Conservation Area boundary.	Review Conservation Area boundary.	CBC	
Poor use of public spaces along the banks of the Barkby Brook	Investigate the opportunity for environmental enhancement along Brookside with improved pedestrian links to the town centre.	CBC	LCC
Damaged and vandalised landscape features in front of Harrisons Row.	Review and repair landscape features to the car park in front of Harrisons Row	CBC	

DEVELOPING MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Based on the issues that have been identified the following objectives will have a positive impact in both protecting and enhancing the character of the conservation area, and providing the basis of a long term management plan:

1. Identify any historic buildings showing signs of neglect. They could be enhanced by removing clutter from elevations (pipes, wiring, brackets etc.), masonry cleaning or repainting. Owners could be approached with suggestions as appropriate. The encouragement of the cleaning of buildings, using methods appropriate to their materials, could achieve significant results visually.
2. Review how the Council's adopted 'Shopfront & Signs' guidance is being used. A face lift scheme for shops could be considered. Aspects could include shop fronts and fascias, blinds, colour schemes, advertisements and signs. Identify any outstanding enforcement issues.
3. Encourage development on sites where infill building would be desirable. Prepare design briefs for such sites to stimulate interest and assist owners and developers to achieve appropriate design and layout.
4. Detailed identification of sites within the highway where hard ground surfaces need to be introduced or renewed, including consideration of the scope to redefine sections of carriageway, realign kerbing, extend and repave pedestrian areas, provide and mark vehicle parking bays. Agree a policy for the selection and use of materials appropriate for particular situations with the Highway Authority.

5. Identify any land in public control that is under utilised and might be appropriate for a landscaping scheme. Address the adequacy of maintenance for such areas. Similarly, examine any neglected private land that can be cleared and reclaimed for positive use. Consideration should be given to the introduction, or reinstatement where they have been lost, of walls, railings and planting to create enclosure.
6. Co-ordinate the placing of all permanent items within the streets. There are opportunities to renew, redesign, re-site, eliminate or combine existing street furniture. Similarly, examine traffic signs and highway markings with a view to their rationalisation. The appropriateness of the existing street lighting and the scope to introduce imaginative lighting schemes, including the illumination of key buildings, also merits examination. Guidelines could be set out in a public realm manual.
7. Examine opportunities for public art in various forms to create distinctive and quality solutions to landscape improvements.
8. Consider the production of heritage trail leaflets to increase community awareness and appreciation, including the encouragement of tourism. This might involve interpretation material, plaques or similar for key sites and buildings.
9. Identify biodiversity enhancements and encourage the provision of bat and bird boxes, particularly swift nest boxes within the fabric of new/converted buildings.

ADVICE & GUIDANCE

Part of the purpose of this Appraisal is to inform and guide development control decisions about the Conservation Area.

Any proposed changes should be sensitive to and take into account the character as described in this Appraisal. New development, including extensions and alterations, must respond to the context and environment, the scale, form, materials and detailing of the existing buildings and the grain and pattern of the built form and the urban spaces of the Area. This is particularly important in Syston where the mediaeval grain of curving streets of variable width and the open massing and scale of buildings can both be easily damaged by inappropriate development.

There are a number of design features in many of the properties which characterise the Conservation Area. Any new development should either incorporate these features or the new design should respect them in a way that they can be seen and recognised both in the old and in the new properties. Specifically these details include door surrounds, window arches and projecting eaves and the prevailing red brick laid in Flemish bond. Given the difficulties in obtaining Swithland slate, Welsh slate would be an alternative; imported or reconstituted slates or roof tiles, either clay or concrete, are not part of the historic palette of materials.

Care should be taken when decisions are made to use materials that are not part of the prevailing palette that the existing character and appearance is enhanced and not damaged. Roof lines, roof shape, eaves details, verge details and the creation of new chimneys are important considerations.

Windows and doors of traditional design make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Area. The use of upvc and standardised high speed joinery techniques nearly always leads to unsuitably detailed windows which will generally be unacceptable in the Area.

The Council will insist on good quality schemes which respond positively to the historic setting of the Area. This extends to small buildings such as garages and also to boundary walls and fences. Minor alterations need to be carefully considered as incremental change can have a significant detrimental effect on the character of the Area over a period of time.

There may be opportunities for innovative modern design. Good modern design could create positive changes in the Area.

Any development within the Conservation Area requiring excavation works is likely to require a considered archaeological assessment and investigation prior to the commencement of development. Many of the earlier buildings may conceal mediaeval or post-mediaeval remains; any works involving the disturbance of the existing fabric will require archaeological investigation.

Many species of wildlife are protected by legislation. Prior to any proposals for development a survey of the wildlife should be carried out where there is a likelihood of a legally protected species or a priority Biodiversity Action Plan species being present and at risk of impact from the development or other management. This may often be the case where it is proposed to use or develop previously unused attic and roof spaces.

Applicants for planning permission must provide a Design Statement to explain the decisions that have been made and to show how proposals relate to the context. It should demonstrate a full appreciation of the local streetscape, how it has developed, including prevailing building forms, materials and plot ratios.

Proposals will be assessed against the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan, Leading in Design and other Supplementary Planning Documents and government guidance contained in PPS1 and PPG15.

The Borough Council Development Department can advise on the need for Planning Permission or Listed Building Consent and can provide guidance on matters such as appropriate methods of maintenance/repairs, changes to shopfronts, alterations and extensions and suitable materials.

CONTACTS

Conservation & Design Team
Tel. 01509 634748
built.heritage@charnwood.gov.uk

Development Control
Tel. 01509 634691
development.control@charnwood.gov.uk

Planning Enforcement
Tel. 01509 634722

SYSTON CONSERVATION AREA - LISTED BUILDINGS

BARKBY ROAD

No. 11 - Grade II

BATH STREET

No. 2 – Grade II

No. 16 (Previously listed as No 14 and 16) - Grade II

No. 18 (Bails Cottage) - Grade II

No. 17 - Grade II

BROOK STREET

No. 2 - Grade II

No. 3 - Grade II

CHAPEL STREET

No. 3 (Chatsley House) - Grade II

No. 5 (Vine House) - Grade II

No. 19 - Grade II

HIGH STREET

No. 21 (Previously listed as No 21 (Oaklands)) - Grade II

No. 33 - Grade II

No. 57 - Grade II

No. 58 - Grade II

No. 59 - Grade II

Barn at No. 59 - Grade II

No. 72 The Thatched Cottage - Grade II

LOWER CHURCH STREET

No. 8 - Grade II

No. 10 - Grade II

Church of Saints Peter and Paul - Grade I

No. 7 - Grade II

MELTON ROAD

No. 1259 - Grade II

No. 1261 – Grade II

Nos. 1324 and 1326 (The Gables) - Grade II

The Fox and Hounds Public House - Grade II

SCHOOL STREET

No. 16- Grade II

THE GREEN

No. 8 - Grade II

No. 10 - Grade II

TURN STREET

No. 16 (Stone House) - Grade II

UPPER CHURCH STREET (recommended to be included in the Conservation Area)

No. 26 (Previously listed as No 26 and 30) - Grade II

No. 32 - Grade II

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