



Birstall Conservation Area Character Appraisal

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BIRSTALL CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Introduction

Birstall Conservation Area was designated in April 1984. It covers an area of 8.3 Hectares.

The purpose of this appraisal is to examine the historic development of the Conservation Area and to describe its present appearance in order to assess its special architectural and historic interest.

The document sets out the planning policy context and how this appraisal relates to national, regional and local planning policies.

The main part of the report focuses on the assessment of the special interest of the Conservation Area:

- Location and setting describes how the Area relates to the historic village and surrounding area;
- Historic development and archaeology sets out how architecture and archaeology are related to the social and economic growth of the village;
- Spatial analysis describes the historic plan form of the village and how this has changed, the interrelationship of streets and spaces, and identifies key views and landmarks;
- Character analysis identifies the uses, types and layouts of buildings, key listed and unlisted buildings, coherent groups of buildings, distinctive building materials and architectural details, significant green spaces and trees and biodiversity.

These elements are brought together in a summary of the special interest of the Conservation Area.

The document is intended as a guide to people considering development which may affect the Conservation Area. It will be used by Development Control in their assessment of proposals. It may, of course, be used by residents of the Conservation Area.

Planning Policy Context

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Local planning authorities have a duty to review the overall extent of designation in their areas regularly and if appropriate, to designate additional areas. The Act

sets out the general duties of local planning authorities relating to designated conservation areas:

- From time to time, to draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas in their districts and to consult the local community about these proposals;
- In exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

'Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment' (PPS 5), published by the Department of Communities and Local Government, states the Government's objectives for heritage assets and puts forward policies to balance the need to ensure the viability or usability of an asset against doing no harm to its architectural, historic, cultural or artistic values. The PPS advises that "*local planning authorities should ensure that they have evidence about the historic environment and heritage assets in their area and that this is publicly documented*" (Policy HE2.1). Conservation areas are 'designated heritage assets'.

A conservation area contains a number and variety of elements which combine together to create the significance of the heritage asset overall. This appraisal describes those elements but it does not attempt to be exhaustive and the policies in PPS 5 lay the duty on all concerned, including residents and prospective developers, to understand the significance of any element.

The Regional Strategy for the East Midlands, published in March 2009, advises local authorities that the historic environment should be understood, conserved and enhanced, in recognition of its own intrinsic value (Policy 27: Regional Priorities for the Historic Environment). The RS is due to be withdrawn but remains in place until provision of the 'Localism Act' are brought into effect by Order of the Secretary of State.

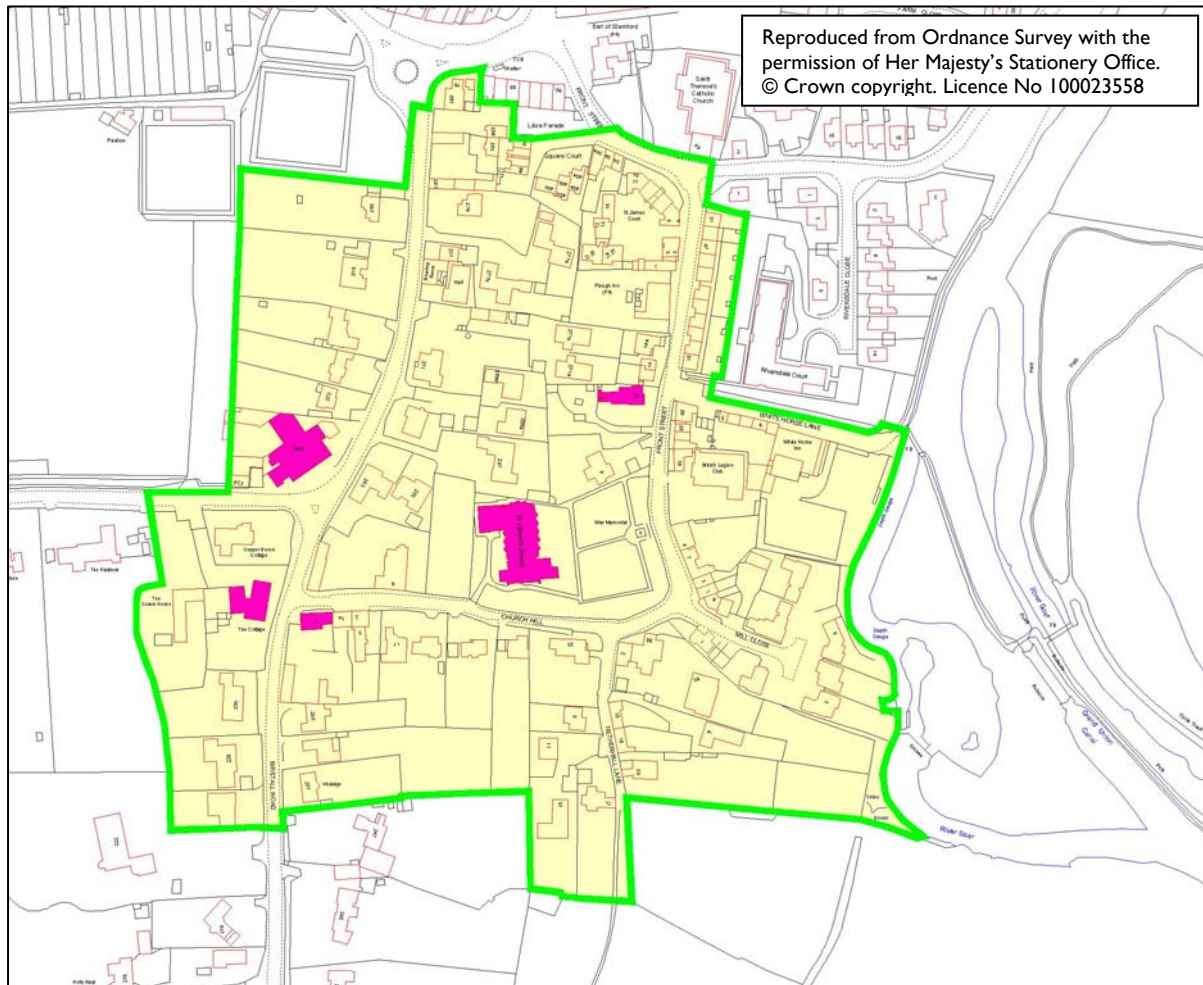
Charnwood Borough Council Local Plan Saved Policy EV/1- Design, seeks to ensure a high standard of design for all new development and that the design should be compatible with the locality and utilise materials appropriate to the locality.

The Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'Leading in Design' reinforces the need to understand the setting and context when proposing development in a sensitive location such as a conservation area. It encourages developers to use local guidance such as Conservation Area Character Appraisals when considering their designs.

Other relevant guidance adopted by CBC

- Backland & Tandem Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)
- House Extensions SPG
- Shopfronts & Signs SPD

ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST



Current map of Birstall showing the Conservation Area and the Listed Buildings

Location and Setting

Birstall is a village in the Soar Valley about 5 Km from Leicester City Centre. The village was vastly expanded in the 20th Century so that it now forms part of the urban fringe of Leicester although it is still very much a recognisable settlement in its own right, separated from the city by the Soar valley.

The Conservation Area is more or less the “old village”, encompassing what remains of the original settlement as it was rebuilt from the middle of the 18th Century. Unfortunately, a substantial part of the historic fabric was lost before the Conservation Area was designated in 1984. Thus Birstall Hall is now a housing estate and The Lawn has been demolished for Birstall Social Club.

The Conservation Area is centred around the church of St James the Great on a pronounced mound which rises fairly steeply from the west bank of the river

Soar. To the east is Watermead Park, an area of recreational land, lakes and marsh which was once an area of extensive gravel pits, with Thurmaston on the far side. To the west is an area of extensive housing estates on the hills. Immediately to the north of the Conservation Area is the present commercial area of the village with further housing estates rising up the hill beyond. To the south is a continuation of genteel suburban housing which gradually drops and tapers to the flat valley bottom of the Soar.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Origins and Development

The “Old Village” of Birstall probably has its origins in Saxon times. The name was first recorded as BurhSteall, meaning “old disused fort” which suggests that the Saxons may have settled an area previously occupied or used by the Romans. Its position on the banks of the river Soar is typical of Anglo Saxon settlements in the East Midlands. The village was built with access to a good water supply from the springs on the slopes above the river; below were the pastures and meadows in the floodplain for the cattle and above stretching out to the west were fields for the crops, wheat, barley, oats, peas and beans. For centuries the villagers farmed a system of open fields divided into strips. The principal fields were called Stoneyfield, Middle Field and Stocking Field.

The mother village of Birstall was Belgrave: the church of St James the Great in Birstall being a chapel with a sister chapel in Thurmaston. At the Conquest the manor of Bursteall, or Burstelle, was taken from Alwin Phochestan and given to Hugh de Grentesmaisnil who gave or sold a portion of it to Widard. The Domesday survey in 1086 has two separate entries for the estates giving their worth as 5oz of gold and 3oz of gold.

For six centuries Birstall remained a poor place where the lords of the manor often chose to live elsewhere and with few families of even modest wealth. In 1751 the lord of the manor, Lady Mary Gifford who was living in Paris sold the entire Birstall estate of 1,000 acres, including the village, to John Bass a wealthy Leicester business man for £21,000. John Bass built himself Birstall Hall by the Leicester to Derby turnpike road and obtained the Act of Parliament in 1759 which enclosed the great open fields and thus modernised the estate's agriculture, to the detriment of the poorer people who were dispossessed.

By the end of the eighteenth century Birstall was becoming a fashionable place for Leicester businessmen to live. The Lawn was built as a country house in the centre of the village and three large farmhouses, The Netherhall, Cliffe House and The Cottage, were modernised and became gentlemen's residences. In 1841 Goscote Hall was built. But whilst Birstall was becoming a middle class suburb of Leicester with the principal land owners displaying a comfortable

benevolence, change continued to be modest for the working man. When the National School was opened in 1860, Mr Walker of The Holt hoped that with education Birstall would no longer be known, at least for the working man, as "that benighted place".

At the end of the 19th Century a short walk to Belgrave allowed you to catch a tram to work in one of the town's many factories. And in 1899 Birstall and Belgrave Station was opened on the Great Central Railway, giving further impetus to new house building west of Loughborough Road on Birstall Hill. At the same time in the old village Elizabeth Whiles built several cottages on Front Street; her initials "EW" can still be seen on the facades.

By the 1920s three of the country estates had sold out to speculative builders and the fourth, the Goscote Estate, was sold in 1933. Birstall was quickly becoming the dormitory suburb of Leicester which it is today. The farmland was covered with estates of semi-detached houses, leaving the old village as a small gem beside the river. Even so, within the Conservation Area, since the end of World War II, there has been a huge amount of infilling, houses along Birstall Road, shops and flats along Front Street, houses in the rear land between Birstall Road and Front Street and houses on the site of Birstall Mill. And away from the Conservation Area the suburban expansion of the village continues with the development of Hallam Fields further up the hill.

Archaeological Interest

There is evidence of human settlement in the area long before the Saxons. People have lived in the area since at least the Iron Age and the area was settled by the Romans though not necessarily on the site of the Mediaeval village.

Roman coins have been found in a garden in Birstall Road and the upper stone of a beehive quern was found in the same garden. The quern may be from the late Iron Age. During the construction in the 1960s of a house in Roman Road, some distance from the Conservation Area, a Roman column drum and capital were found. The size of the column was larger than that of a typical villa portico and it was thought to be more typical of a temple or public building. Substantial remains of two "Belgic" pots of the late Iron Age have been found in Watermead Park.

Inside the church of St James the Great is a carving similar to Viking carvings and known in the village as 'The Birstall Beast'. There are also the remains of a Saxon window in the church.

The Domesday survey recorded two mills in Birstall. It is likely that one stood on the site of the post Mediaeval watermill on the west bank of the river, close to the present Mill Road. This mill was used for grinding corn but at the end of its life in the 20th Century it was used for making leatherboard.

There is a strong possibility of finding more archaeological evidence below ground anywhere within the Conservation Area.

Population

The current population of Birstall is much larger now compared to its historic population. In the parish there are now about 11500 people, although, there are only 150 addresses in the Conservation Area. Historically, Birstall was never very large: in 1564 there were 26 families; in 1851 the population was 491 and in 1901 there were 611 people but by this time the village was expanding quickly.

A description of occupations in 1901 showed that the old staple forms of wage earning, farm labouring, framework knitting and domestic service were no longer the only option for the working man and woman: 27 males were agricultural labourers, just over 4%, whereas fifty years earlier 12% were labourers; only 1 framework knitter remained, whilst fifty years earlier there were 67. The new century saw a growing variety and independence in employment. 45 people were employed in shoe manufacturing, there were 11 teachers, 12 market gardeners, 6 of them owning their own business, 6 managers, 4 commercial travellers, and 4 engineers or machine minders.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Plan Form

Historic Birstall consisted of a ring of streets around the church with three lanes leading down to the river. In relation to the river the two main streets were called Front Street and Back Street, the former is still so called but Back Street has become Birstall Road. Going out, the village was connected to Wanlip, Thurstaston, Belgrave and the turnpike, now the A6. This pattern still exists today but may be less obvious because of the traffic on Birstall Road. Part of the character of the Conservation Area is the tranquillity of the streets away from Birstall Road.

Townscape

The old village maintains some of its rustic character. There is a great variety of buildings, tall and low, with hedges, banks, walls and trees. Throughout the Area there is a considerable feeling of enclosure. The original houses or more particularly their outhouses were built up to the edge of the street. Even where houses are set back from the road there are generally walls and hedges and often the houses are set on quite high banks. The streets still have some of the mediaeval character, narrowing and curving, which gives a feeling of seclusion and intrigue.

The old village does not appear from the Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th Century to have had a strong urban character. There was a terrace of housing along the east side of Front Street but elsewhere the buildings were fairly scattered with substantial areas of open space and orchards between them. In the 20th Century all these spaces have been built on, creating a suburban feel throughout the village.

Birstall Road has a great variety of buildings along it. Many of the houses are relatively new, being set back from the road. Some of the older outhouses remain at the edge of the road. Many gardens have either high brick walls or stone or slate walls topped with a hedge. For a substantial length of the road there is a high, rather straggly hedge of holly, overgrown with ivy. Throughout, there is a general feeling of enclosure, which is strengthened by the rising and curving nature of the road.

Front Street is a quiet street bounded for much of its length on the east side by late Victorian terraced cottages, many built by Elizabeth Whiles. They stand at the edge of the road, enclosing the space. Opposite them there is a greater variety of buildings, the older ones at the edge of the road, some newer ones set back, higher up. The churchyard is bounded by a stone wall with a dense line of yew trees. Overall, the feeling is one of enclosure. There is an unattractive gap at the car park of the Royal British Legion.

Where Front Street leaves Wanlip Lane there are some terraces of shops which look out beyond the boundary of the Conservation Area upon the car park and high close boarded fence of the Earl of Stamford Pub. There is a pleasant view where Whiles Lane dips down to the canal and the broad valley of the river. However, the whole stretch from the roundabout at the end of Sibson Road to the junction of Whiles Lane is very poorly defined, albeit that the Libra Parade of shops and some of the roadway are outside the boundary of the Conservation Area. The expanse of tarmac, pavement, and private car parks create a poor setting at the entrance to the Conservation Area. There has been a marked improvement in 2011 through the repaving and installation of new street furniture around the shops beside the roundabout.

Church Hill is a quiet narrow lane. As with Front Street, the older houses are built to the edge of the road and the newer houses are set back. Much of the lane is bounded by earth banks with hedges above.

Of the lanes which lead to the river, Whiles Lane itself is not included in the Conservation Area.

White Horse Lane is a narrow street. The south side is tightly bounded by a terrace of outbuildings, now converted to residential use, which broadens out at the White Horse Inn. The north side is bounded by a hedge and higher up on the

bank is the relatively new block of Riverside Court. The lane continues to the towpath which gives access to the network of footpaths in Watermead Park.

Mill Close is a new cul-de-sac of detached dwellings. The junction with Front Street is rather broad, which spoils the feeling of enclosure though the houses at this end have been very well constructed and positioned at the edge of the road to give the appearance of being original houses in the village. Lower down the slope they are suburban houses with front gardens, a form that has less distinctiveness. There is a backdrop of trees behind the houses.

Netherhall Lane is an attractive narrow street which leads down the hill to a stile from where there is a footpath across the meadows to Birstall Road, possibly an historic track. The east side of the lane is bounded tightly by a substantial tall outbuilding, beyond which is Claremont House. The west side of the lane is bounded by quite a tall steep bank above which there is a variety of houses, some relatively old, others much newer.

Interrelationship of Spaces

The principal open space within the Conservation Area is the churchyard of St James the Great. It sits above the ring of streets with a fairly dense line of yew trees separating it from Front Street. Otherwise the open spaces are outside the boundary of the Conservation Area.

There is what feels like a rather intimate relationship between the Old Village and Watermead Park. The river and the broad valley in which it flows are largely hidden from view in the streets of the Conservation Area. Both Whiles Lane and White Horse Lane give access to the towpath along the canal and there is a footbridge over the canal into the main part of the park.

Key Views and Vistas

Views into and out of the Area are quite limited. The enclosure of the streets by buildings and trees means that interest derives from the changing nature of the view as one progresses. There are views of Watermead Park from the churchyard but few glimpses out from the village. Looking in from the towpath and the Park the village on the hill is only glimpsed through the trees.

The approach from Sibson Road and from Wanlip Lane is marred by the poor quality of the façade of the shops and the expanse of road and pavement. The new roundabout has started to improve this. Looking out to the north also has limited value.

The approach from Red Hill along Birstall Lane is more interesting. The Area is marked at the brow of the hill by the narrowing of the road at the junction with Church Lane where the thatched cottage reduces the width of the road. This

narrowing has been strengthened by a highways intervention to restrict traffic to a single lane. Just before the brow the low stone built stable block at the edge of the road is another marker of the Conservation Area.

Looking towards Leicester along Birstall Road there is a narrow view of the city spread out on the plain.

The finest view is from the end of Netherhall Lane where one can look out over the peaceful valley of the river Soar, with the tall buildings of the city rising beyond the trees.

Landmarks

The old village, and hence the Conservation Area is rather tucked away from the general concourse. Even the church tower is largely hidden from view. The old National School erected in 1860 creates a focus at the junction of School Lane with Birstall Road. The School is built of random granite with an imposing Gothic porch of ashlar containing two doorways. The roof of plain clay tile is long and sweeps down to the ground floor which has stone faced quatrefoil windows. Within the slope of the roof are two plain dormers and on top is a cupola of delicate design.

Claremont House, No 20 Netherhall Lane is a fine example of a Victorian villa in red brick with a hipped slate roof and white painted sash windows. It looks out over the meadows of the valley but tucked away it could easily be missed. It is in good condition, more or less intact, with some good details at the window heads, wide overhanging eaves, terracotta finials on the ridges of the outbuildings, chimney stacks and pale buff chimney pots.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Building Types, Layouts and Uses

There is quite a surprising variety of buildings in the Conservation Area. Mostly they are now domestic and residential but within this category there are tall 3 storey Georgian houses, Victorian houses, terraced cottages, a few remaining timber framed and thatched cottages, outhouses and workshops now converted as dwellings. Of the non-domestic buildings, besides the church with its large 1960s extension, and the school, there are two pubs, the Reading Room, now Gunn's Gym, and some commercial buildings.

Uniquely in Birstall within the settlements of Charnwood there are Birstall DIY and Blue Moon Beauty Salon on Birstall Road, Birstall Cabs on Front Street and No 2 Whiles Lane which make a distinctive contribution to the character and appearance. They are built of random field stone or granite with brick quoins, but

it is their form which makes them special. They were probably outbuildings and are built at right angles to the street, a simple rectangular plan with a single ridge with the gable end at the back of the pavement. Beyond the Conservation Area No 17 Sibson Road has a similar form.

As a result of the great expansion of Birstall there is a very large proportion¹ of buildings in the Conservation Area dating from the 20th Century whose plans and layouts diverge from the traditional pattern, although, that traditional pattern is still evident. Aside from the polite gentlemen's residences the local buildings were of a simple rectangular form, of one and a half or two storeys with a single ridge parallel to the street. At the rear there may be an extension at right angles but this would generally not be visible from the public realm. Some of the terraces built by Elizabeth Whiles on Front Street have an unusual layout with a small front extension which adds variety to the street.

Key Listed Buildings and Structures

The principal building at the centre of the Conservation Area is the church of St James the Great, a fine Grade II parish church. The original mediaeval building was extensively restored in 1860 by Gilbert Scott. The church is built of ironstone and granite with a Swithland slate roof and a squat tower with an embattled parapet. In the 1960s a large modern extension was built to the north. The building of the extension entailed a substantial removal of the north wall of the original church. The extension is built of concrete panel with strong vertical fenestration and a shallow copper roof. Inside is a wide, light and airy space for the church services leaving the original nave for social and communal purposes. The entrance to the churchyard has a delicate wrought iron overthrow with a lantern.

Two other listed buildings make a substantial contribution to the Conservation Area. The National School is an interesting building in Gothic style of local stone and ashlar. It is well placed at the junction of School Lane and Birstall Road creating a rather low aspect with its long sloping roof of Swithland Slate. There are new extensions at either end of the building which match reasonably well with the original though the exposed brick face at the rear to the north does not do justice either to the Listed Building or to the Conservation Area.

At the corner of Birstall Road and Church Hill is one of the few remaining older cottages. Forge Cottage is timber framed with white painted brick infill panels and a thatched roof.

There are two other timber framed cottages, both listed, but they make little contribution to the Conservation Area because they are largely screened from view by tall hedges.

¹ Half the addresses in the present Conservation Area do not appear on the 19th Century maps.

Key Unlisted Buildings

Some of the outbuildings along Birstall Road create an interesting reminder of the former old village. Among them are Birstall DIY. The building is of random pieces of Swithland slate with red brick quoins and a Swithland slate roof. The shop front could be easily restored to a traditional style which would enhance its attractiveness. On the other side of the DIY yard is the Blue Moon Beauty Salon, a similar building but of brick with a Welsh slate roof. There is a similar building, unfortunately very poorly maintained, also of random Swithland slate with red brick quoins at 72 Front Street occupied by Birstall Cabs. This building lies outside the Conservation Area.

Also along Birstall Road are the old Reading Room, now Gunns Gym, a low building of red brick with tiles laid on edge to form the surrounds of the door and windows. Further up the hill at the edge of the road is the stable block to No 5 Church Hill. The Blacksmith's Forge is also a Key Building.

The imposing double pile three storey Georgian building of No 5 Church Hill has suffered inappropriate changes. It has many fine original sash windows but too many have been replaced with wholly inappropriate uPVC which has none of the delicacy or charm of traditional timber and does great damage to the integrity of the building and also to the Conservation Area.

In the quiet part of the Conservation Area are the two pubs, The Old Plough and The White Horse. Both are well maintained and proud of their position in the village.

Coherent groups

The terrace of Elizabeth Whiles cottages along Front Street together with the Old Plough Inn and the Elizabeth Whiles building, now called St James Court, on the other side of the street give a good sense of 19th Century Old Birstall. The sense continues to the south with the more varied cottages and terraces from No 1 to No 29 Front Street. This group is broken by the car park of the British Legion club but is enhanced by the new cottages at the entrance to Mill Close.

Building Materials and Architectural Details

Walls

There is a variety of building materials in the Conservation Area. The original buildings in the old village would have been timber framed and of these only a few remain. Of the rebuilding of the village in the 19th Century the normal building material was red brick, laid to Flemish bond, with outbuildings of Swithland slate or stone from Charnwood Forest. There are also earlier brick buildings in the village and often these have plinths of slate or forest stone. The residential expansion of the early 20th Century introduced Tudorbethan style which is very common in the village as a whole and has a few examples in the Conservation

Area. These are generally individual detached houses, with brick at ground floor and black painted timbering and white painted render infill panels at first floor. Many other buildings of brick in the Conservation Area have been painted white or rendered and painted.

Roofs

The original roofing material was probably thatch. Swithland slate is also used but by the late 19th Century the dominant material was Welsh slate with some plain clay tile. Amongst these many of the 20th Century houses have roofs of concrete tile.

Some of the houses of the new estate of Mill Close have roofs of dark plain clay tile with patterned bands of shaped tile.

Doors and Windows

The finer houses in the Area have timber sash windows. Mostly the traditional windows are timber casements. However, a large proportion of windows in all kinds of building have been replaced with uPVC, which is most unfortunate since much of the character of the houses, and consequently the Area, has been lost. By contrast most doors remain as timber.

Details

There is a George V wallmounted letterbox tucked beside No 10 Netherhall Lane.

A feature at The Gate House on Mill Close where emblems of a Green Man with piercing eyes have been placed on each of the window heads.

Parks, Gardens and Trees

The Conservation Area is well endowed with trees. Indeed much of its character derives from them. Mostly they are in private gardens both at the front and at the rear. A number of trees were subject to Tree Preservation Orders before the designation of the Conservation Area, as have some since the designation. For most of its length Birstall Road is shaded with trees and hedging which contribute to its sense of seclusion. Along Church Lane there are many shrubs on the banks. Two areas of woodland surrounding the Grade II listed Cottage on School Lane were also given protection before the designation. There is an important Beech tree at the junction of Birstall Road with School Lane. The Lime trees and the Yew trees in the churchyard make a particular contribution to the character of the Area.

The only public green space in the Conservation Area is the churchyard. It is a peaceful space, secluded and sheltered by trees, which adds to the sense of calm which is the hallmark of the Conservation Area away from the busy Birstall Road.

Many of the Elizabeth Whiles cottages on Front Street are graced with hanging flower baskets, which add to the street scene.

Beyond the Area itself there are several important green spaces. The Country Park is the best known, offering many opportunities for recreation and leisure. At the end of Nether Hall Lane is a delightful open meadow leading to the edge of the river. It is traversed by a footpath. Along School Lane is Birstall Recreation Ground, with a bowling green, football and cricket. It links to the public garden at the roundabout at the end of Sibson Road. White Horse Lane gives access to the towpath along the canal which in turn gives access to Watermead and to the north becomes a very pleasant canalside walk.

Biodiversity

The River Soar, which strongly defines the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area, has been notified as a Local Wildlife Site, a non-statutory designation given to the most valuable ecological sites in Leicestershire. Beyond the ribbon of the river, Watermead Country Park, which was created as a result of past sand and gravel extraction, now forms an extensive network of wetland habitats, including lakes, wet woodlands, wet meadows, hedgerows and reedbeds.



Unsurprisingly, some of the species principally associated with the river flood plain, have found their way into the Conservation Area. The grass snake *Natrix natrix*, has been found in compost heaps in gardens off Birstall Road. This is one of only six native reptiles in Britain and it is entirely harmless. Unlike other snakes which give birth to live young, the grass snake lays eggs in piles of

vegetation, such as compost heaps, where the incubation process benefits from the heat of decomposition.

Besides the range of small garden birds, species such as the sand martin *Riparia riparia* have been recorded flying around the Conservation Area. Sand martins are known to use river corridors as travelling highways and feed above water bodies and reed beds which are rich in insects. A special nesting bank has enabled them to breed successfully at Watermead Country Park.

Several roosts of common pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* have been recorded within the Area. These bats are likely to use the Area's high-quality network of mature trees and hedgerows as insect-rich foraging grounds. A

grounded noctule bat *Nyctalus noctula* was also found in Front Street: this species is associated with mature trees rather than buildings and although it is not known where the roost is located, the river habitat and Country Park would represent optimum foraging grounds in close proximity to the Conservation Area.



DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST

The main contributions to the special character of Birstall Conservation Area are:

- The relationship between the old village and Watermead Park
- The form and plot position of the remaining buildings, Birstall DIY, Blue Moon Beauty Salon on Birstall Road, Birstall Cabs on Front Street and No 2 Whiles Lane, which are unique to Birstall.
- The secluded and tranquil nature of the streets away from the traffic and commerce
- The wealth of many trees
- The conservation of Old Birstall within the suburban housing estates.

Weaknesses

Within the Area the large car park of the British Legion has left an awkward gap in the otherwise enclosed character of Front Street. For the full depth of the tarmac there is a range of unattractive single storey outbuildings which make the gap more noticeable. The oversized image of a poppy, the British Legion logo, on the plain gable end of the house announces the presence of the Club but it emphasises and does not mitigate the gap.

Just beyond the Area, where Front Street leaves Wanlip Road, the large area of tarmac pavement, the broad street junctions, the close boarded fence of the Earl of Stamford Pub, and the poor quality of the Libra Parade of shops all combine to make an unsympathetic setting to the Conservation Area. The pub itself and the newer St Theresa's Catholic Church behind it are both interesting and attractive buildings as is the last remaining stone built cottage of No 2 While's Lane. All three would be worth incorporating into the Conservation Area but to do so would

require a substantial investment from both private and public sources to improve the car parking and public realm between and around them.

Some of the fine sash windows of Cliffe House have been replaced with uPVC to the detriment of this fine Georgian double pile building and the Area.

The street lighting and road signage including yellow lines is the standard applied to the whole county. It is not necessarily appropriate to the Conservation Area.

In the evenings Front Street suffers from a large volume of car parking from customers at the two pubs and the British Legion Club. This disturbs the otherwise peaceful character of the Area. However, any control that could be imposed on the parking would require an increase in signage and yellow lines which would be to the detriment of the village character of this part of the Conservation Area and in conflict with the comment immediately above.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

General Principles

The appraisal above should be used to inform and guide development decisions.

Any proposed changes should be carried out in a sensitive manner, taking into account the established character. New development must respond to its immediate environment i.e. its context, in terms of scale, form, materials and detailing. Otherwise, alterations will have a detrimental effect on the historic and locally distinctive form of the Area.

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

Central government guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 5, the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan, Leading in Design and other SPD will be used to assess the quality of proposal for new development.

The character of the Conservation Area identified in the appraisal document is such that the following general principles should be noted when considering any development in all parts of the Conservation Area:

The Conservation Area retains some of the distinct “grain” or pattern of built form and spaces which are part of its historic development. This gives the Area its individuality, characterised by the pattern of historic buildings, ancient footpaths and highways and clearly defined boundaries. The “grain” is an important part of the character of the Conservation Area and needs to be protected.

- The emphasis for new proposals will be on high quality of design. There may be opportunity for innovative modern design. However a dramatic contemporary statement is unlikely to be appropriate.
- Scale is the combination of a building’s height and bulk when related to its surroundings. Proposed new development must take into account the scale of the existing buildings, and must not dominate or overwhelm them.
- Alterations and extensions must respect the form of the original building and its locality. The use of high quality materials and detailing, whether modern or traditional is essential. Roof lines, roof shape, eaves details, verge details and the creation of new chimneys are important considerations.
- Windows and doors of a traditional design respect the historic nature of the buildings to which they belong and make a very important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The use of upvc and standardised high speed joinery techniques nearly always leads to unsuitably detailed windows which will be generally unacceptable in the conservation area. In most cases the Building Regulation requirements

can be met without the need to use clumsy and awkwardly detailed windows.

- The appraisal has identified the types of materials that characterise the Conservation Area and where possible they should be used to help alterations respect the established character.
- Applicants for planning permission must provide a meaningful “Design and Access Statement”, to explain the design decisions that have been made and to show how proposed alterations relate to their context. A detailed analysis of the locality should demonstrate that there is a full appreciation of the local streetscape and how it has developed, including prevailing building forms, materials and plot ratios.
- Safeguarding of protected species must be taken on board when considering planning proposals such as conversion, tree felling, housing development and other changes which may affect their roosting places, commuting routes and feeding areas.

Enforcement strategy

Effective enforcement is vital to make sure there is public confidence in the planning system to protect the special character of the Area. Unauthorised development can often be damaging to that character.

Taking proactive action can improve the appearance and character of the Area, making it more attractive and in some instances increasing the potential for investment. Effective monitoring of building work to make sure it is carried out in accordance with the approved details and with planning conditions ensures new development makes the positive contribution envisaged when permission was granted.

In order to protect the character of the Conservation Area the Borough Council will seek to:

- use enforcement powers in cases where unauthorised development unacceptably affects the character of the Conservation Area;
- take proactive action to improve or enhance the appearance of the Area;
- monitor development under way to make sure it fully complies with the terms of any planning permission or listed building consent.

Carrying out unauthorised work to a listed building or to protected trees and hedgerows and the unauthorised demolition of a building within a conservation area is an offence. In such cases, the Council will consider prosecution of anyone responsible and enforcement of any necessary remedial action.

The powers set out in Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 will be used where sites are identified as detracting from the character of the conservation area by being eyesores or untidy.

Article 4 Direction

The quality of a conservation area is often threatened by the cumulative impact of numerous small changes to many buildings. Terraces that once displayed integrity of design through the use of matching features such as doors, window, chimneys and porches, have been unbalanced by various alterations and additions. On the whole such changes do not require planning permission.

In order to preserve and enhance the character of conservation areas, many planning authorities use Article 4 Directions to restrict permitted development rights on groups of buildings or areas. Restrictions normally relate to particular elements such as replacement windows and doors, or roofing.

In carrying out the survey it was noticed that some of the fine sash windows of Cliffe House have already been replaced with uPVC to the detriment of both this fine Georgian double pile building and the Conservation Area. It is proposed therefore to consider an Article 4 Direction to preserve the remaining windows and encourage the restoration of the missing sash windows..

General condition

The Conservation Area is in a fair condition. The large proportion of 20th Century infill has diminished the historic character and damaged the open space of the private gardens especially between Birstall Road and Front Street.

Possible buildings for spot listing

In carrying out the appraisal buildings within the Conservation Area are identified for “spot listing”, i.e. considered for inclusion on the list of statutory listed buildings.

In 1978 an attempt was made to protect Nos 5 and 7 Front Street but statutory listing was refused. An attempt was also made to protect No 2 Whiles Lane, outside the Conservation Area, but this too was refused. No 72 Front Street, Birstall Cabs, needs to be included in the Conservation Area. The forge at the top of Birstall Road was built when the original village forge was demolished to make way for the School. It is suggested that this forge be listed.

Possible Boundary Changes of the Conservation Area

In carrying out the appraisal the qualities of the late 19th century and early 20th century estates beyond the present Conservation Area to the south and west of the old village were noted. In particular, the fine detached houses on Tempest Road and Park Road, a substantial stretch of Loughborough Road, and other streets deserve a fuller appraisal and may benefit by designation as a conservation area, either enlarging the present Area or creating a new one.

As noted above, No 72 Front Street, one of the traditional stone buildings which is currently in a very poor state of repair, should be brought into the Area.

Enhancement opportunities

The principal opportunity for enhancement would be a comprehensive scheme to improve the stretch of Front Street within the Area and its junction with Whiles Lane. If this were done in conjunction with private investment to improve the car parks and fencing to the Earl of Stamford pub and St Theresa's church it may be possible to incorporate these two interesting buildings along with No 2 Whiles Lane into the Conservation Area.

The shop fronts of No 72 Front Street, and the DIY store and the Beauty Salon on Birstall Road would benefit by general refurbishment and restoration to traditional style.

Economic development and regeneration strategy for the Area

A limited fund is available from Leicestershire County Council to repair Listed Buildings.

Strategy for the management and protection of important trees, greenery and green spaces

The Borough Council supports the priorities set out in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan for the conservation of a variety of wildlife and their habitats within Charnwood. The Council will collaborate with its partners when the plan is reviewed and modified to ensure that the necessary actions are being taken by the appropriate agencies.

General management guidelines

- Retention and protection of mature trees.
- Replacement planting to provide the next generation of trees.
- Additional planting at key strategic points to reinforce habitat connectivity within the biodiversity network.

Monitoring change

A photographic record of the conservation area has been made and will be used to help identify the need to review how changes within the conservation area are managed. A greater degree of protection will be accomplished if the local community help monitor any changes.

Consideration of resources

This management plan sets out the commitment of the Borough Council to protecting the character and appearance of Charnwood's conservation areas and

how it will use its resources to achieve these aims. Pursuing all actions may be seen as desirable but continued monitoring and review will help focus the use of available resources in the most effective way.

Summary of issues and proposed actions

Conservation Area Issue	Proposed Action	Lead Partner	Other Partners
Protection of No 72 Front Street	Investigate extension to the Conservation Area boundary	Charnwood Borough Council	
Poor character of junction of Front Street and Whiles Lane	Consider enhancement scheme	Leics County Council	Charnwood Borough Council and Birstall Parish Council
Shop fronts of the DIY store and Beauty Salon on Birstall Road	Consider enhancement scheme	Birstall Parish Council	Charnwood Borough Council
Preservation of sash windows at Cliffe House	Consider Article 4 Direction on this building	Charnwood Borough Council	
Inappropriate street lighting and road signage	Consider more appropriate street lighting and discuss reduction of signage	Leics County Council	Birstall Parish Council and Charnwood Borough Council

Developing management proposals

Various forces, historical, cultural and commercial, have shaped the development of the conservation area, creating a sense of place and individual identity. The character and appearance of the conservation area is vitally important, both in attracting investment in the area itself, and in the encouragement of initiatives to the benefit of the wider community.

Community involvement

This document will be made available as a draft via the website for 4 weeks prior to submission to Cabinet for adoption. A public meeting will be held in Birstall so that local residents and businesses may contribute their ideas about the Area. All comments and responses will be considered and appropriate amendments made to the document before it is submitted to Cabinet.

Advice and Guidance

The Borough Council Planning and Regeneration Team 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 and Design Team
Tel. 01509 634791
built.heritage@charnwood.gov.uk

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

Planning Enforcement
Tel. 01509 634722

Bibliography

John Nichols, "History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire", Vol 3, 1800

Michael Smith, "Eight Ounces of Gold", Birstall and District Local History Society, 1998

Acknowledgements

The Council is grateful to the assistance of Michael Smith, local historian in Birstall, whose work covers the whole span of development in the village and is very pleasant to read.

Statutory Listed Buildings in Birstall

All listed Grade II:

Church of St James the Great
The Cottage, School Lane
School, School Lane
The Cottage, 10 Front Street
1 Church Hill