

## WHITECROFT CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT



### **The legal background**

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Section 69 also requires authorities to review their areas from time to time to see if further designation or alteration to existing designations is necessary.

Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15) deals in some detail with the assessment and designation of conservation areas in section 4, and the adopted planning policy documents for the Island contain sections relating to development within such areas.

### **Character**

**This area is characterised by the robust and imposing Victorian buildings of the former hospital. The buildings are set within the landscaped grounds which are contained by mature trees adding to the sense of isolation. The group is dominated by the central clock tower which also acts as a local landmark. The nearby farm buildings are more varied and informal but have an important visual and historic link with the hospital.**

NB this expression of 'character' is derived from the study below.

### **History of development**

The majority of the hospital development was laid out and constructed over a defined period commencing in 1894 and completed 1896.

The buildings were constructed as a County lunatic asylum and were initiated as a result of funds being made available by the Secretary of State to the Isle of Wight County to provide its own facilities. Isle of Wight patients were previously sent to Knowle Hospital near Fareham and following the opening of the site at Whitecroft, a number of patients from Knowle Hospital were transferred to the Isle of Wight.

Records indicate that the buildings were designed by B S Jacobs of Hull and built by Garlick and Horton of London, with the majority of bricks being made locally from clay on the site. This has resulted in the buildings having a clearly identified character and appearance and an overall unity of materials and design.

As a result of changes in government policy to allow more emphasis on care of patients in the community, the hospital was gradually closed down with the final patients leaving in 1992. The majority of the buildings are now therefore disused. Some buildings of Whitecroft Farm predate the hospital development and some later incursions are apparent here.

### **Archaeology**

Prior to the construction of the hospital the site was in agricultural use and formed part of Whitecroft Farm. There are a number of identified archaeological remains in the area and a historic Parish Boundary from earlier land patterns.

## **Setting**

The former hospital is centrally situated on the Island, approximately 3 miles south of the market town of Newport. The site is within a rural location and forms an identifiable group of buildings in a landscaped setting situated within a valley.

It comprises an area of approximately 20 hectares and abuts the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is accessed via Sandy Lane which is a narrow country lane leading from Cox's Corner on the Newport to Chillerton road through to Blackwater. There are currently two main access points to the site and the former staff dwellings are also situated adjacent to the lane with separate accesses.

## **Materials**

The main features of the buildings are characterised by the use of orange/red brickwork with stone string courses, cills and other details and hipped slate roofs.

## **Height, mass & form**

The original hospital buildings are of substantial scale and mostly of two stories in height with the obvious exception of the clock tower which acts as a landmark in the centre of the group.

The buildings are in blocks sited in an arc to the south east of the tower.

## **Typical details**

The buildings retain the original window and door joinery which mostly comprises white painted timber sash windows, most of which are of small pane design with typical "six over six" sliding sashes, some of these are surmounted by three pane fanlights. The exception

being the main reception and administration block which has timber sliding sash windows without glazing bars to the main elevation. Two of the ward blocks contain curved bay windows also with sliding sashes, some of which retain their original curved glass.

Whilst the remaining buildings are of relatively plain and utilitarian design, they are of good quality and retain most of the original detailing. The local associations and integrity of the site as a whole, together with the use of the interesting detailing and the overall relationship of the buildings to the central clock tower combine to add a unity and character to the site which is considered worthy of retention and enhancement. This combined with the somewhat unusual plan form and retention of most of the important structures on the site together with much of the original landscape setting means that the site is of considerable local interest and importance.

Brick elevations, large scale sash windows and hipped slate roofs are characteristic elements.

## **Paving**

Paving is informal with tarmac paths and tracks and concrete to the areas around the buildings. Some of this is now degrading due to disuse and lack of maintenance.

## **Trees and open space**

The original buildings are contained within a landscaped parkland setting. The site is mostly surrounded by a substantial bank of mature planting including mature trees and hedgerows. This is particularly noticeable along the

south western area where there is a substantial wooded boundary and along the northern boundaries with Sandy Lane which as identified earlier, comprise a mixture of mature tree planting with hedging which virtually screens the site from outside. The substantial pine trees in this area are also a distinctive feature which are seen in long distance views as a base for the views of the tower. The eastern side is somewhat more open although still identified by banks of planting. The area to the south west was formerly part of the kitchen gardens and orchard and the former gardener's cottage still exists, although now in separate ownership. The land falls to the south west and then rises again further to the west where the former sports ground and pavilion can be seen in the distance.

#### **Positive elements**

- Integrity of buildings as a group
- Quality and identity of the traditional buildings.
- Landscape setting and open spaces.
- Importance of trees as part of the landscape and in their own right.
- Clock tower as a landmark.
- Relationship between the buildings and their setting.

#### **Negative elements**

- Lack of use and deteriorating condition of the buildings.
- Lack of landscape management.
- Later structures which detract from the traditional group.
- Poor building treatment and use of space in the central area where former ancillary buildings have been removed.

#### **Potential for enhancement**

- Repair of buildings and reinstatement of lost features.
- Improved landscape management.
- There is some opportunity for sensitive development in accordance with the adopted design brief. This could include demolition or replacement of the later buildings, particularly the chapel and former nurses' home which intrude into the setting of the original group.
- Removal or improvement of later buildings within the former farm complex and sensitive enhancement of this group.

#### **Further information please contact**

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#### **For detailed information on policies, legal background and national advice, please refer to**

The Isle of Wight Unitary Development Plan  
The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990  
Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 – Planning and the Historic Environment.

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